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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO  
THE HOLOCAUST.

ISABEL LOUISE WOLLASTON.

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UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM.

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As religions of redemption, Judaism and Christianity are predicated upon the belief that God acts in history, and that humanity is created in the divine image. These two beliefs combine in the concept of a covenant between God and humanity. The covenant can be understood as a dialectic of promise and counter-testimony: the promised redemption is rooted in a historical event and will be realised in history. Thus, history can either bear witness to the covenant, or serve as counter-testimony. As the "paradigm evil event", the Holocaust (the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis) stands as radical counter-testimony to the redemptive claims of both Judaism and Christianity.

In Judaism, there are three broad responses to the counter-testimony of the Holocaust. First: the rejection of the covenantal framework (Richard Rubenstein). Second: the denial of the theological uniqueness of the Holocaust (Eliezer Berkovits). Third: the reformulation of the covenant (Emil Fackenheim). In each case, the dialectic between promise and counter-testimony is resolved: the former is preserved at the expense of the latter, or vice versa. The tension between the two is maintained, not in a formal theology, but in the novels and essays of the Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel.

Christian responses to the Holocaust are judged both by the extent to which they maintain the dialectic of promise and counter-testimony, and by their appreciation of the Church's history of anti-Judaism. It is ironic that the Christian response most analogous to that of Wiesel does not directly address the Holocaust. It is argued that the work of Stewart Sutherland is more analogous to that of Wiesel, than that of theologians engaged directly in formulating a Christian response to the Holocaust (Rosemary Radford Ruether, Jürgen Moltmann, Johann Baptist Metz).

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PART I. THE COVENANT AND THE COUNTER-TESTIMONY OF HISTORY:  
JEWISH THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO THE HOLOCAUST.

## INTRODUCTION:

Theological responses to the Holocaust emerge as part of a dialectic between covenantal affirmation (symbolised by the Exodus) and the counter-testimony of history. However radical the conclusions, the reformulation of covenantal thinking in the light of the Holocaust constitutes a deeply traditional response. Thus, Jewish religious responses to the Holocaust are rooted within an awareness of the dialectical relationship between promise and counter-testimony.

Covenantal faith centres upon the Exodus, an event that incorporates three essential truth-claims: God is, by definition, a God who cares; human life is of infinite value; and the conviction that both of these claims will be vindicated in the messianic future. The Exodus serves as both norm and model. It is normative because these three truth-claims form the core of all subsequent reinterpretations of the covenant. The Exodus serves as a model: there is a clear recognition of the gulf between the covenantal promise of Sinai and reality. The Exodus provides a blueprint for the future: the Messianic Age will be the Exodus "writ large".<sup>1</sup>

By viewing the Exodus as both norm and model, Judaism comes to define itself in terms of testimony. The Jews, as the Chosen People, bear witness to the promise of the future on the basis of the Exodus as an historical reality. As a consequence of this self-definition, historical events are seen as testifying for or against the covenantal promise: history is the sphere in which redemption will occur. Historical events are, in effect, the "barometers of God's disposition toward His people".<sup>2</sup> The credibility of the Jews' testimony fluctuates in the light of their historical circumstances: prosperity appears to confirm their claim to be the Chosen People, whereas disaster undermines the credibility of this claim. Disaster also serves to undermine the Jews' willingness to give such testimony.



Thus, Judaism constitutes a "wager of faith"<sup>3</sup>: the Jews continue to testify to the covenantal promise (symbolised by the Exodus) in spite of the inherent risk that the cumulative counter-testimony of history will finally prove too great. Thus, each successive historical disaster poses a critical challenge to the credibility of the Jewish faith. Major events, such as the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), and the Expulsion from Spain (1492), resulted in reformulations of the covenant: religious thought adapted in order to maintain its credibility in the face of historical disaster. The Orthodox rabbi, Irving Greenberg suggests that there are three recurrent responses to catastrophe.<sup>4</sup> The first is to deny the theological significance of post-Exodus history: the covenant is held to be immune from the counter-testimony of history ( a response that is current in most Orthodox circles). A variant of this response is to acknowledge the significance of disaster, but to assert that it is only transitory: a corresponding redemptive act is imminent.<sup>5</sup> The second response is to reinterpret the covenant in the light of historical counter-testimony. The third and final response is to concede that belief is no longer credible in the face of the counter-testimony of history. Each of these responses can be illustrated by reference to Jewish history.

Greenberg suggests that Jewish history forms three "great cycles": the Biblical, the Rabbinic, and the post-Holocaust. The Biblical 'cycle' provides the 'raw material' for the reinterpretation of the covenant in the light of historical counter-testimony. Alan Berger suggests that this structure be developed to incorporate Lurianic Kabbalah and Hasidism: both movements gave rise to significant developments in covenantal thinking.<sup>6</sup> Although Rabbinic theology undoubtedly constitutes the major stage in the reinterpretation of the covenant, Berger is correct in noting the significance of Lurianic Kabbalah and Hasidism. It is therefore suggested that that there are five key stages in the development of covenantal

thinking: the Biblical; the Rabbinic; Lurianic Kabbalah; Hasidism, and post-Holocaust religious thought.

In adopting this schema, it is necessary to register two caveats. First, the effect of historical counter-testimony upon covenantal thinking only becomes evident with the benefit of hindsight. It has yet to become apparent which, if any, of the responses to be considered will become normative for Jewish faith after the Holocaust. Second, the reinterpretation of covenantal thinking is only one of Greenberg's three suggested responses to disaster. The dominant response has always been to deny the theological significance of post-Exodus history. Movements that have since become normative (such as Rabbinic theology or Lurianic Kabbalah) began as minority groups in the face of conservative opposition. The emphasis on post-Holocaust reinterpretations of the covenant cannot be said to reflect the concerns of mainstream Orthodox Judaism.

The first part of this thesis seeks to contextualise religious responses to the Holocaust within the dialectic of covenantal promise and historical counter-testimony. The first chapter offers a brief review of the developments in covenantal thinking in biblical and rabbinic theology, Lurianic Kabbalah, and Hasidism; and concludes by considering a number of the more conservative responses to the Holocaust. The remaining three chapters analyse the responses of Richard Rubenstein, Eliezer Berkovits, and Emil Fackenheim. These three thinkers loosely represent Greenberg's spectrum of responses to disaster: Rubenstein argues that the covenant is no longer credible in the face of the overwhelming counter-testimony of the Holocaust; Berkovits asserts that the event offers no new theological challenge; and Fackenheim strives to reinterpret covenantal thinking in the light of the Holocaust.

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NOTES:

1. Irving Greenberg, 'Judaism and History: Historical Events and Religious Change', *Shefa*, 1979, 2, Spring, 19-37, 21.
2. Alan L. Berger, **Crisis and Covenant: The Holocaust in American-Jewish Fiction**, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985, 1.
3. Greenberg, 'Judaism and History', 24.
4. Ibid. 25-6.
5. Ibid. 29.
6. Berger, **Crisis and Covenant**, 1-6.

1. THE "WAGER OF FAITH": COVENANT AND CRISIS.

1. 1. INTRODUCTION.

1. 2. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY.

1. 3. RABBINIC THEOLOGY.

1. 4. LURIANIC KABBALAH.

1. 5. HASIDISM,

1. 6. ORTHODOX RESPONSES TO THE HOLOCAUST.

1.1. INTRODUCTION.

The Exodus is both the normative event and model for the Jewish faith; the memory of which has enabled Judaism to survive in spite of the counter-testimony of history. Recognition of the gulf between promise and reality is an integral part of the Jewish faith and has its roots in the Exodus: the gift of the Law is juxtaposed with the account of the creation of the Golden Calf. The biblical narrative is notable for its critical portrayal of those involved: the Exodus is not an idealised memory. The tension between promise and reality, integral to the Exodus itself, increases with every subsequent historical disaster. The cumulative weight of history's counter-testimony threatens to overwhelm covenantal affirmation. The trauma of historical disaster generates fundamental revisions of covenantal faith. Thus, the four major reinterpretations of the covenant arise under the pressure of historical counter-testimony. Rabbinic theology emerged in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.) and the failure of the Bar Kochba revolt (135 C.E.). Lurianic Kabbalah reflects the trauma generated by the Expulsion from Spain (1492). Hasidism emerges out of the disillusionment generated by the conversion to Islam of the supposed Messiah, Shabbetai Zvi (1666); and the succession of pogroms in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Eastern Europe. Last, there is the counter-testimony of the Holocaust. Each catastrophe challenges the credibility of covenantal faith. The 'wager of faith'

concludes that belief in the covenant remains credible, despite such overwhelming counter-testimony.

The biblical accounts constitute the 'raw material' for later theological interpretation of the covenant. Rabbinic theology marked the key stage in development and modification of the covenant. Subsequent interpretations built upon this Rabbinic foundation. The key concepts in the elaboration of covenantal thinking concern divine power, divine immanence, the level of divine-human responsibility, and the understanding of evil.

## 1. 2. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY.

The message of redemption that is central to the Jewish tradition grew out of and is validated by an event in Jewish history: the Exodus, the freeing of the Hebrew slaves from bondage in Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the existence of two earlier covenants--with Noah and Abraham--the Exodus marks the most developed stage in the understanding of the relationship between God and humanity. The covenant governs the biblical understanding of divine power and immanence, and inspires the traditional Jewish theodicy--suffering is interpreted as punishment for sin.

The biblical account is built around three successive covenants, with Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Each marks a growth of maturity in the divine-human relationship. In the earliest of the three covenants, God is totally dominant: He addresses His subjects as the transcendent Creator. Noah obeys, but never speaks. The covenant is established in the aftermath of the Flood, as a symbol of God's promise:

never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. (Gen.9:11, RSV).

The second covenant marks a development: Abraham both speaks to God and disputes some of His decisions; an obvious case in point being the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:20-33). The transformation of the biblical divine-human relationship is completed on Mount Sinai, with the establishment of the Mosaic covenant.

The Sinai covenant reveals both that God cares for His people, and that He considers them to be of infinite value. The very notion of covenant is an evaluation of worth: one only enters into a covenant with a partner capable of responding to this initiative; the concept necessarily entails a degree of equality:

One does not enter into a partnership with someone whose moral discourse is incomprehensible. The notion of partnership entails dialogue, mutual respect, and shared purpose.<sup>2</sup>

God is not totally transcendent: He is accessible to His people. Indeed, this accessibility is an integral part of the covenant. Torah provides the moral basis that enables the Jews qua Chosen People to contend with God: the covenant is binding upon both partners. God is obliged to protect His people; whereas the Jews are to keep the Law and bear witness to the divine presence in history (Ex. 19:3-6; 32:11-4). In the biblical account, God is clearly the dominant partner, initiating the covenant and punishing the Israelites for failing to fulfil their responsibilities (Ezek. 20:33-8). However, there are also occasions when individuals dispute with God--the obvious illustration being the book of Job.

God's dominant role in the covenant informs the biblical conception of divine power and immanence. God is both Creator and Lord of History. He calls the Jews out of Egypt and leads them into the land of Canaan. God leads the Jews in the Wilderness quite literally, as a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21-2). Israel's history reflects both divine power and divine immanence. God's power is employed, either ensuring Israel's success, if she is faithful, or bringing about her defeat, if she strays from the covenant (Deut. 27-8). This direct intervention in human affairs is paralleled by direct communication of the divine will via the prophet. The presence of God was also immediate; first, in the tabernacle; then, in the Ark of the Covenant; and finally, in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. The cultic



system and the prophet are the logical counter-parts to a God who intervenes in history on behalf of His people.

It is, however, significant that even in the biblical accounts, there is an awareness of divine dependency upon humanity: God is known only insofar as He has revealed Himself in His dealings with the Jews. He is "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob" (Ex. 3:16), who is primarily known through His covenant with Israel. It is of primary significance that God introduces Himself by reference to the covenantal relationship:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (Ex. 20:2)

Without the Jews' testimony to God's actions on their behalf, He would remain unknown or inaccessible. Thus, the Jewish historian, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi emphasises the central role of memory in the covenantal relationship: "memory has become crucial to ... faith, and ultimate to its very existence."<sup>3</sup> The centrality of memory to the covenant is illustrated by the numerous injunctions to remember, and parallel warnings against forgetfulness (Deut. 32:7; Isa. 44:21; Micah 6 5; Deut. 6:10-2, 8:11-8). The cult centred on re-enacting past history; rehearsing God's acts on behalf of His Chosen People. The biblical text incorporates a number of poetic fragments which would have originated in this cultic act of remembrance; the connection between memory and the cult is made explicit in the ceremony of First Fruits:

A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the LORD the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Deut. 26:5-9)

The rehearsal of past events enables the individual to recognise his heritage: the Exodus becomes a common history.

The importance of memory and testimony lies in the fact that it is a function that can only be executed by humanity. Therefore, although the biblical accounts bear witness to an embryonic stage of the covenant, God is still dependent on His human partner:

Despite the glorification of God and His power in the Biblical accounts, God is, as it were, dependent on human testimony for awareness of His Presence. The locus of redemption is in a human setting and in the sight of humankind.<sup>4</sup>

The Exodus owes its redemptive significance to the Jews' acceptance of the covenant at Sinai. The importance of the human response to divine initiatives is reflected in the biblical accounts, in the narratives detailing the actions of individuals on behalf of their community. Having said this, the overall emphasis is still upon God, as the 'senior partner' in the covenant.

#### The Problem Of Evil:

The biblical response to the problem of evil primarily follows the schema outlined above: suffering is a punishment for human disobedience. However, there are the rudimentary outlines of two complementary, alternative strategies: evil arises whenever God "hides" His face, and that contention is a valid response to this state of affairs.

The basic theodicy asserts that evil is the direct consequence of sin:

When Israel obeyed the Lord, it was victorious. When it strayed, it was defeated. Defeat, itself, was the best proof that disobedience had taken place.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, every historical defeat, including the twin catastrophes of the loss of the Northern Kingdom and the destruction of the First Temple, could be interpreted in terms of divine retribution for sin. Indeed, this basic schema constitutes the editorial standpoint of the Deuteronomic History (Deut. 27-8, 32-3; 1 Kings 13:33-4,

14:7-16, 16:12-3, 21:20-4). The conquerors of Israel, whether the men of Ai (Josh. 7:2-26) or Nebuchadrezzar (2 Chron. 36:17-21), are the agents of divine retribution. Israel is punished precisely because of her election: special status brings additional responsibility:

You only have I known / of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you / for all your iniquities. (Amos 3:2)

Israel's history can be interpreted by reference to a straightforward schema of rewards and punishments: prosperity is a sign of covenantal faithfulness; defeat is a consequence of sin. This theodicy has remained central to Orthodox Judaism.

Yet, the biblical account also acknowledges the limitations of this position: the schema of rewards and punishment does not necessarily equate with that of faithfulness and sin. Hence, the reiterated plea:

Why does the way of the wicked / prosper?

Why do all who are treacherous / thrive? (Jer. 12:1)

Two hypotheses are suggested. The first posits that "the imagination of man is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). Humanity possesses an evil inclination (Gen. 6:5-6; Jer. 3:17). However, such a suggestion runs contrary to the assessment of creation as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The alternative hypothesis suggests that evil is an integral part of God's creation:

I form light and create darkness / I make weal and create woe, / I am the LORD, who do all these / things. (Isa. 45:7)

Hence, the prologue to the book of Job, where the Satan receives God's permission to inflict suffering (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-8).

The biblical accounts suggest two complementary response to this dilemma. In the first, evil occurs as a consequence of God "hiding" His face (**Hester panim**). Originally, the Hiding of God's face was interpreted as a punishment for sin:

I will surely hide my face in that day on account of all the evil which they have done, because they have turned to other gods. (Deut. 31:18)

However, the Hiding of God's face is held to be increasingly arbitrary and unjustified. Hence, the second response: the believer contends with God, asserting his innocence:

Why dost thou hide thy face? / Why does thou forget our affliction and oppression? / For our soul is bowed down to the dust; / Our body cleaves to the ground. Rise up, come to our help! (Ps. 44:25-6)

Contention is as much a demand for evidence of God's presence with His people, as it is a demand for an "answer" to an individual's suffering.

The twin notions of divine hiddenness and contention form the basis of subsequent developments in the treatment of the problem of evil. Rabbinic theology emphasised divine hiddenness through the concept of the **Shekhinah**--the presence of God. Isaac Luria developed a cosmology in which divine hiddenness is an a priori assumption. Hasidism combined both developments with an emphasis upon the need for contention with God. The biblical accounts therefore bear witness to the seeds of subsequent interpretations.

### 1. 3. RABBINIC THEOLOGY:

To go on with the same religious way of life would be a contradiction of the historical model of revelation, which demands that catastrophe be taken seriously in order that Judaism make credible--not merely pious--statements.<sup>6</sup>

The reinterpretation of covenantal thinking, instigated by Yohanan ben Zakkai in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple (70) and the suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt (135), has proved the most fundamental to date. The rabbinic concept of the **Shekhinah** going into exile with Israel laid the foundations for the cosmology of Isaac Luria, and the developments of Hasidism and post-Holocaust religious thought. The rabbinic response to disaster was to assert that God was more hidden and elusive: direct access to the divine was no longer

available. Hence the emphasis on seeking the divine through Torah study and covenantal obedience. This development in the interpretation of divine immanence is reflected in an alternative authoritative teacher: the rabbi; there is no role for a prophet in a world where the divine presence is hidden. Divine hiddenness also demands an increased level of human responsibility for the covenant.

Rather than interpreting the twin catastrophes of 70 and 135 as punishment for sin, or a sign of divine absence, the rabbis argued that God was present with his people in their suffering: the **Shekhinah**--the divine presence--once present in the tabernacle, now accompanies Israel into exile. God qua Lord of History has withdrawn, but He is present with His people in the form of the **Shekhinah**. The concept derives from the root, **shakan**--to dwell. The biblical basis for the rabbinic interpretation is found in the Psalms:

When he calls me, I will answer / him;

I will be with him in trouble. (Ps. 91:15)

Thus, the **Shekhinah** is held to accompany Israel into exile:

Come and see how beloved Israel is before God; for whenever they went into exile the **Shekhinah** went with them. When they were exiled to Egypt, the **Shekhinah** went with them; in Babylon the **Shekhinah** was with them; and in the future, when Israel will be redeemed, the **Shekhinah** will be with them. (Talmud, Meg. 29a)<sup>7</sup>

Rabbi Akiba (50-135) argued that the **Shekhinah** was the indwelling presence of God in the world, which yearns for and is dependent upon humanity: wherever Israel goes, the **Shekhinah** necessarily follows. The **Shekhinah's** presence with Israel illustrates God's continuing love for His People.

Increased divine hiddenness demands a change in religious practice. Jewish religious life no longer centres around the Prophet and the cult: the prophet is replaced by the rabbi, and the cult by the synagogue and the home. The end of prophecy was taken as normative :

there could be no direct communication or intervention by God in an era of divine hiddenness. Thus, the prophet is replaced by the rabbi. Divine guidance is attained through study of Torah. Hence, the significance of the rabbinic insistence on the divine origin of both the Oral and written Torah. Rabbinic rulings are binding because they are an indirect reflection of the divine will. However, because they are only an indirect reflection of the divine will, it is possible to have conflicting rulings: the rulings of both Hillel and Shammai (respectively president and vice-president of the Sanhedrin in the first century B.C.E.) are correct; a fact that is symptomatic of increased divine hiddenness:

The truth is that, in a world in which God is hidden, both can be right. The redemption is not manifest nor is the way to it single and illuminated. The rabbis are searchers, guided by past models. They seek ways of living the redemption, walking toward it, and telling the story in a form believable after a catastrophe.<sup>8</sup>

The rabbis reaffirm the continuity between their position and that of biblical theology, while acknowledging the discontinuity.<sup>9</sup> They are attempting to present a theology that is consistent with both the covenantal promise and life in the aftermath of catastrophe.

The transition from prophet to rabbi is paralleled by one from temple cult to synagogue and home. One of rabbinic theology's greatest successes was the domestic reinterpretation of the cult. Every home becomes a "hidden temple"; hence the application of strict purity regulations to the home. The theological justification for this lies in the fact that the divine presence is no longer identified primarily with Jerusalem: the *Shekhinah* is found wherever there are Jews.

Increased emphasis upon divine hiddenness demanded a greater degree of human responsibility for the covenant: God no longer intervened directly in history on behalf of His people. The burden of covenantal responsibility passes to the Jews. This responsibility is discharged through Torah study, covenantal obedience, and prayer. Whereas, in

the biblical era, God communicated His commands via the prophet; in the rabbinic era, the people address God, via synagogue and domestic worship, or Torah study. Divine intervention becomes a ritualised memory, rather than an expectation. History is less obviously *Heilsgeschichte*: meaning only becomes apparent through continuous study.

Yohanan ben Zakkai and rabbinic theology was not the only response to the disasters of 70 and 135. The period bears witness to all three of Greenberg's possible responses. The rabbinic reinterpretation was opposed by the *B'nei B'tera*; an Orthodox group who opposed Yohanan ben Zakkai, arguing that the tradition as it stood was sufficient: there was no need for a further reinterpretation of the covenant. The *B'nei B'tera* focused its opposition on the transfer of the rabbinic centre from Jerusalem to Yavneh, arguing that certain practices, such as the blowing of the Shofar, could only take place in the Jerusalem Temple. The *B'nei B'tera* discounted the significance of the destruction of the Second Temple as counter-testimony. An alternative strategy was to look to an imminent redemptive act, which would cancel out the negative significance of the Destruction. The Talmud refers to one group, *Avlei Zion*--the Mourners of Zion, who refused to eat meat or drink wine (symbols of joy and celebration) until the Temple was rebuilt. This vow obviously reflects a short-term strategy: such asceticism is not a realistic long-term policy. Many religious groups thus put all their energies into working for the restoration of the Jerusalem Temple and Jewish sovereignty. Rabbi Akiba was one of many put to death for his support of the, possibly messianic, Bar Kochba revolt of 135. The suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt was of crucial importance to the success of rabbinic Judaism, and the ultimate survival of Judaism as a living faith:

Had the temple-centred view triumphed, the Jews would have had to put all their effort into regaining Jerusalem, a policy that would have spelt frustration,<sup>10</sup> spiritual exhaustion and, finally, devastation.

The years after 70 C.E. also bear witness to Greenberg's third response: the loss of belief in the face of the overwhelming counter-testimony of catastrophe. The most famous illustration being the Talmudic heretic, Elisha ben Abuya, who concluded that "there is neither judgement nor judge".<sup>11</sup> Greenberg suggests that widespread Jewish assimilation in the prevailing Hellenistic culture can be interpreted as a negative response to the counter-testimony of history.<sup>12</sup>

#### The Problem Of Evil:

The development in the rabbinic response to the problem of evil was not as dramatic as the reinterpretation of divine immanence and covenantal responsibility. The conservative theodicy that suffering was a punishment for sin continued to dominate. This theodicy received its classical expression in the formula **Mi-p'nai-hata'einu--** for our sins we are punished. An alternative theodicy also developed, reflecting the increased emphasis upon human covenantal responsibility. The concept **Yissurim shel ahavah--**suffering in love--acknowledged the fact that the 'punishment' often outweighed the 'sin'. Suffering was interpreted as either chastisement (God punished Israel more than other nations because of her special status), or as a mystery--to be embraced in faith. This response to the problem of evil drew upon the concept of **Kiddush haShem--**Sanctification of the Divine Name. The Jew sanctified God's Name through Torah study and covenantal faithfulness. Acceptance of suffering, or death, in faith represented an extension of this principle: the sufferer bore witness to God through faith. The death of Rabbi Akiba, in the aftermath of the Bar Kochba revolt, became the archetype for accepting death as **Kiddush haShem**. Indeed, this archetype governed the response of subsequent generations to centuries of persecution in the Diaspora.

#### 1. 4. LURIANIC KABBALAH:

Lurianic Kabbalah was a messianic / redemptive system which emphasized both the special role of the Jewish people and the idea of the individual



responsibility of each and every Jew for helping to perform Israel's God-given task.<sup>13</sup>

Isaac Luria developed his cosmology in the aftermath of the expulsion of the Sephardic community from Spain in 1492. The Expulsion was traumatic, in that the Sephardic community was long-established and flourishing. It was a literary and philosophical centre, being home to Judah Halevi (1075-1141), Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), Abraham ben David Halevi ibn Daud (1110-80) and Hasdai Crescas (1340-1412). Kabbalah flourished prior to the Expulsion, primarily in Provence in the thirteenth century. It received its classic formulation in the Zohar, the Book of Splendour. These developments culminated in the system of Isaac Luria (1534-72). Luria (or Ari--the Lion) studied Talmud in Cairo, before retiring for seven years to an island in the Nile to meditate on the Zohar. In 1569, he travelled to the centre of Kabbalah at Safed, and spent the rest of his life communicating his ideas to a small group of disciples. Luria's ideas were disseminated after his death by one of these disciples, Hayim Vital. Lurianic Kabbalah posits a three stage cosmology: **Tzimtzum** (contraction or withdrawal); **Shevirat Ha-kelim** (the Breaking of the Vessels); and **Tikkun** (repair or restoration).

Kabbalah is a mystical system, based on the notion of the Divine as Becoming, and thus in a constant state of flux, rather than Being. In Luria's system, the Divine is simultaneously the **En sof**: the Infinite, transcendent, perfect, and beyond thought; and the Hidden God, dependent upon humanity for redemption. Luria is not positing a kenotic self-emptying of the Divine, but a simultaneous existence in two contradictory modes:

The infinite God can exist simultaneously with the finite God; the omnipotent God of spiritual activity can exist simultaneously with the impotent God dependent on human action; the God who brings redemption can also be the God who awaits redemption.<sup>14</sup>

Luria responds to catastrophe by asserting both divine power and divine powerlessness; divine transcendence and divine immanence.

Luria articulates a three-stage cosmology. The first stage, **Tzimtzum**, is a response to Luria's own question:

How can there be a world if God is everywhere? If God is "all in all" how can there be things which are not God? How can God create out of nothing if there is no nothing?<sup>15</sup>

He answers his own question by suggesting that exile is a metaphysical attribute of God, even prior to Creation. Indeed, it is necessary for God to go into 'exile'. The **En sof** contracts into Himself, creating an empty space (**tehiru**) in which Creation can take place. The first act of Creation is therefore negative rather than positive: divine contraction or absence is an essential prerequisite.

The second stage in Lurianic cosmology is **Shevirat ha-kelim**--the Breaking of the Vessels. After **Tzimtzum**, primal light floods into the **tehiru**. This light creates the vessels, the external shape of the **sefirot**, the ten heavenly spheres linking the **En sof** to creation. However, the vessels prove incapable of retaining the divine light and shatter, allowing the **nizonot**--the divine sparks--to escape. The primal light escapes into the upper half of the **tehiru**, while the broken vessels, with the **nizonot** still attached, fall into the lower part. The cosmos thus splits into two: the Realm of Divine Light and the Kingdom of Evil. Evil gains its power from feeding off the trapped divine sparks.

The final stage in this cosmology concerns the attempt to repair **Shevirat ha-kelim**. Subsequent history can be understood as a series of attempts at **Tikkun**--repair or restoration. Humanity was created in order to accomplish this task: as a divine soul within a body controlled by evil powers, Adam would overcome his own weakness and restore creation. However, in failing in this task, Adam initiated a catastrophe comparable to **Shevirat ha-kelim**, with the subsequent loss of yet more divine

sparks. Israel's election marked a further attempt at **Tikkun**: the covenant both marked Israel's acceptance of this task and provided the means by which it would be accomplished. However, the creation of the Golden Calf proved yet another catastrophe. Israel's subsequent history is interpreted in terms of advances and setbacks in the attainment of **Tikkun**. The concept of **Tikkun** is of crucial importance in the development of covenantal thinking: every individual Jew is personally responsible for the attainment of **Tikkun**. A divine spark is attached to every act showing correct **kavannah**--intention; whereas every time a Jew sins, a further spark is lost. Humanity has **total** responsibility for the covenant:

Lurianic kabbalah significantly elevates man's status in the covenantal relationship. Luria's cosmogenic myth of exile and redemption views God as a savior desperately in need of salvation.<sup>16</sup>

God is totally dependent on human willingness to bring about **Tikkun**; a notion which finds expression in the image of the Messiah 'in chains' awaiting redemption. Lurianic Kabbalah therefore offers a total inversion of the biblical interpretation of the respective covenantal roles of God and humanity.

#### The Problem Of Evil:

Isaac Luria follows earlier Kabbalah in questioning the three basic premises of theodicy: God is all-powerful; God is good, and evil exists. The divine is all-powerful prior to **Tzimtzum**. After this, God is dependent upon humanity. Neither is God unequivocally good: evil is a direct result of the creative process; and, as God is "all in all", cannot be attributed to an outside agency. Evil must necessarily be part of the divine. Luria also challenges the notion that evil exists: it 'feeds' off the **nizonot**; it has no independent existence. In Lurianic Kabbalah, suffering is an inevitable result of **Shevirat ha-kelim**. The appropriate response is **Tikkun**: the repair or restoration of a creation in which suffering takes place.

### 1. 5. HASIDISM:

Hasidism differs from earlier reinterpretations of the covenant, in that it is not a reaction to a specific historical catastrophe (as in the case of Rabbinic theology and the destruction of the Second Temple, or Lurianic Kabbalah and the Expulsion from Spain). It arises in response to a number of factors; the main three being : the disillusionment generated by the false messiah, Shabbetai Zvi (1626-76).<sup>17</sup>; the succession of pogroms against Eastern European Jewry, including the notorious Chmielnicki massacres (1648 following); and severe economic depression. Hasidism developed as a revivalist movement, offering the majority of Jews a clear sense of identity and purpose.

The movement was founded by Israel Baal Shem Tov, the Master of the Good Name (1700-60)<sup>18</sup>; originating in Podolia and Volhynia, before extending throughout Eastern Europe. However, the nature of the movement is such that it defies easy interpretation. Hasidism incorporates a number of schools or dynasties, each with a different authoritative Zaddik--righteous or holy man. The schools derive their name from the town where the original Zaddik held his court; thus, there are various schools, including the Bratslav, Lubavitch, Satmar, and Wizsnitz Hasidim. Each school reflects the views of its original Master; views which often conflict. It is therefore impossible to present a single interpretation of Hasidism; although all the schools reflect a shared emphasis upon joy, **ahavat Israel**--love of the whole people Israel; and **Devekut**--cleaving to God. In many respects, Hasidism can be viewed as a reinterpretation and popular dissemination of the ideas of Lurianic Kabbalah. Hasidism humanises Luria's system by supplanting **Tikkun** with **Devekut**; offering an individual, rather than a cosmic perspective on redemption.

Hasidism adopts the Lurianic paradox of divine power and divine powerlessness, and pushes it to extremes. It has been suggested that Hasidism be interpreted as

panentheism: all things are in God.<sup>19</sup> This suggestion reflects the centrality attached to divine omnipresence. Hasidism differs from Lurianic Kabbalah in arguing that **Tzimtzum** is only an apparent divine withdrawal: God is present throughout creation. **Tzimtzum** is a positive, rather than negative, creative act. Existence derives from emanations of divine light. However, this light is too bright, so it has to be 'filtered'; in order to be effective, the divine light is necessarily limited. According to Hasidism, God is present throughout creation in the form of divine sparks. The dispersal of divine sparks thus becomes a positive, rather than a negative, act: it is a sign of divine omnipresence, rather than divine self-limitation or absence:

There is nothing in the world, large or small, which is isolated from God, for He is present in all things. (The Rabbi of Polnoye)<sup>20</sup>

Hasidism follows Rabbinic theology in arguing that the divine presence is found wherever there are Jews. Indeed, this principle is extended to the assertion that the divine presence is diffused throughout creation.

The Hasidic emphasis upon divine omnipresence is paralleled by the assertion of divine omnipotence: God is **Ribbono Shel Olam**--Master of the Universe. Following on from their reinterpretation of **Tzimtzum** as only an apparent withdrawal, the Hasidic Masters emphasise God's role as Creator, Lord of History, and initiator of the Covenant. They also follow Luria in asserting divine powerlessness. The fact that the divine presence is dispersed throughout creation means that God is necessarily hidden. The divine presence is not immediate: it is necessary for the individual to search for God. Hasidism links this understanding of the hidden divine presence with the rabbinic notion of the **Shekhinah**, and the Lurianic concept of the dependent God: the **Shekhinah** is dependent on humanity searching and finding it. If humanity elects not to seek for the **Shekhinah**, then the divine presence necessarily remains hidden:

Imagine two children playing hide-and-seek; one hides but the other does not look for him. God is

hiding and man is not seeking. Imagine his distress.  
(Barukh of Medzebozh)<sup>21</sup>

In Hasidism, it is the knowledge that God is hidden which is important: "when man knows that God is hidden God is hidden no longer".<sup>22</sup>

In many respects, Hasidism synthesises elements of Rabbinic theology and Lurianic Kabbalah. Its unique contribution lies in its emphasis upon **Devekut** at the expense of **Tikkun**, and in the importance attached to the **Zaddik**. **Devekut** originally meant attachment or devoutness. However, from the thirteenth century, the term was applied to a state of intimate communion with God. Hasidism's innovation lay in making **Devekut** the focal point of the religious life. The founder of the movement, the Baal Shem Tov, equated **emunah** (faith) with **Devekut**: "faith ... is the intimate communion of the soul with God".<sup>23</sup> **Devekut** is equated with awareness of the omnipresence and immanence of God; thus, falling away from a state of **Devekut** is tantamount to estrangement from God. **Devekut** differs from **Tikkun** in that it is attainable by the individual; whereas the **tikkunim** (restorative acts) of an individual are only a minor part of a cosmic whole. **Tikkun** was a fundamental concept in the development of covenantal thought: it marked the transition to total human responsibility. However, it was also a concept which gave little immediate consolation: there was no tangible, immediate result. The attainment of **Devekut** offered an individual, and realizable goal.

It is necessary to note that there were two interpretations of **Devekut**, one more elitist than the other. In many cases, **Devekut** was interpreted in a mystical sense: it was a state realised through contemplation, preferably in retreat. Interpreting **Devekut** in this way limited its appeal. However, the mystical interpretation of **Devekut** was combined with a less esoteric reading: **Devekut** could be attained through all activities; all that is required being the appropriate

frame of mind--**Kavannah**. Thus, secular activities can become an act of worship, if they embody **Devekut**.

The link between the mystical and the pragmatic interpretation of **Devekut** is found in the figure of the **Zaddik**, the central authoritative figure in Hasidism. The **Zaddik**, or he "who lives by his faith", was held to be endowed with spiritual powers. Hasidic faith is defined as adherence to a specific **Zaddik**. The Hasidic Master, Nahman of Bratslav argued that there were four unique **Zaddikim**: Moses, Simon bar Yohai (a second century rabbi, traditionally accredited as author of the Zohar), Isaac Luria, and the Baal Shem Tov. He himself was the **Zaddik hador**--the **Zaddik** of his generation. The majority of Hasidim disputed this claim, arguing that there were a group of **Zaddikim** in every generation, forming a crucial link in the chain between the individual Jew and the Messiah. The **Zaddik** was a person who performed **Tikkunim** every day, and who had the ability to ascend to the upper worlds through **Devekut**. He gains spiritual strength from his followers faith in him; who, in return, receive spiritual sustenance and protection from evil. Thus, the **Zaddik** attains the highest level of **Devekut** on behalf of his followers. Such a high level of mystical communion cannot be maintained without interruption. Therefore, the **Zaddik** has to break off from **Devekut**, in order to attain higher spiritual heights after a respite. The **Zaddik's** career is thus marked by alternate spiritual ascent and descent; the latter is often marked by extreme depression.<sup>24</sup> Some **Zaddikim** were convinced that attainment of the highest state of **Devekut** would enable them to force the Messiah to come. The **Zaddik's** followers provided for his material support; in return, they received blessings.

#### The Problem Of Evil:

Hasidism's response to the problem of evil is informed by its concepts of divine omnipresence, **Devekut**, and the centrality granted to the **Zaddik**. There are two primary strands to the problem of evil. The first emphasises the **Zaddik's** ability to redeem evil. The second acknowledges

the continued existence of suffering despite the Zaddik's efforts, and responds by emphasising the need for joy and/or contention with God.

The call to redeem evil is the logical response to the Hasidic insistence that God is in everything. In effect, Hasidism is building on the Lurianic idea of the **nizonot**. Evil gains its spiritual power by feeding off the divine sparks. Thus, evil and good are integrally linked; by redeeming the former, the **Zaddik** releases the latter. The need to open oneself to temptation, in order that evil may be redeemed, forms a recurrent theme in Hasidism. However, the dangers of this policy are also acknowledged; hence the importance of the **Zaddik**. The sins of the followers are transferred as sinful thoughts to the **Zaddik**, who, because of his superior spiritual powers, is able to redeem them by transforming them into the original good--thus releasing the trapped divine spark. As a result of the Zaddik's labours, a hasid's repentance is accepted by God.

The Baal Shem Tov suggests an alternative explanation of evil; one that combines a hasidic emphasis upon divine omnipresence with the rabbinic concept of suffering in love. He suggests that suffering is the inevitable consequence of finite existence:

Evil and suffering are the price we have to pay for our very existence since without a finite, imperfect world there could be no creatures to benefit from God's goodness. Consequently, God's judgement and sternness are themselves the products of God's love. When man acknowledges his suffering in love he makes, as it were, **Elohim** "the Lord", the God of mercy. 25

The Baal Shem Tov is employing the notion that **Tzimtzum** is a positive creative act: it enables human existence to come into being. However, such self-limitation nevertheless has negative repercussions: the existence of evil and suffering. Yet, creation remains a positive, rather than negative, act because God provides redress to the situation: by accepting suffering in love, humanity causes divine grace to flow; without this human response,



God's majesty would remain incomplete because He would be unable to be All-Merciful.

In spite of these arguments, Hasidism was acutely aware of the depth of Jewish suffering in Eastern Europe, both from pogroms and from economic deprivation. As a result, the Hasidic Masters were exercised by the challenge to continue affirming the covenantal promise in the face of seemingly overwhelming historical counter-testimony. There were two, not necessarily exclusive, strategies for coping with this problem. The first response helps to explain the hasidic emphasis upon the need for joy and fervour, particularly in worship. Under the influence of Lurianic Kabbalah, life was interpreted as a battle between good and evil; with the former striving to redeem the latter. Joy or fervour formed a crucial weapon in this battle:

Sadness and sorrow help the evil powers, while happiness and joy drive them away. The essential idea is the ongoing battle to redeem and uplift the trapped sparks--to transform evil into good and to help the Zaddik in his struggle against the satanic forces.<sup>26</sup>

Hasidic expressions of joy or fervour do not arise at the expense of memories of suffering, but are rather part of a concerted effort to oppose the balance of power in the world: suffering is a sign of the dominance of the powers of evil in the world; whereas joy and fervour are the Hasid's means of defeating these powers.

An alternative, and indeed complementary strategy is to emphasise the need to contend with God. This emphasis on contention is one of the major reasons for Elie Wiesel's interest in Hasidism. In Wiesel's reading, there are two approaches to contention; the second being the more aggressive. The Zaddik, as both a holy man and the representative of his community, is entitled to contend with God, reminding<sup>him</sup> of His covenantal responsibilities. Hasidic contention differs from the biblical or rabbinic model: the Zaddik addresses God as an equal. The first approach is conciliatory; the tone being respectful, almost apologetic:

Don't think of man's sins, I beg of You. Think rather of his good deeds. They are fewer, I agree. But you must admit, they are more precious.... I ask of You: don't be harsh with Your children; rare as it may be, it is their kindness that should surprise You. (Rebbe Leib, The Grandfather of Shpole)<sup>27</sup>

The strategy is to acknowledge Israel's sins, but to suggest that God should overlook them out of love for His people. The second approach is much more aggressive, and is typified by the Hasidic Master, Levi-Yitzhak of Berditchev; to such an extent that Barukh of Medzebozh was led to remark:

If we were to accept the Rebbe of Berditchev's reasoning ... there would not be a single Jew towards whom God is not guilty.<sup>28</sup>

The suggestion is that, as God is omniscient, He presumably knew how the covenant would develop, and is therefore being unjust in punishing Israel. Levi-Yitzhak of Berditchev develops this argument by appealing to the legend that God offered the covenant to other nations, who refused the offer; only Israel was prepared to accept the covenant:

From the moment You concluded a covenant with Your people, You have consistently tried to break it by testing it; why? Remember at Sinai You walked back and forth with Your Torah like a peddler unable to dispose of his rotten apples. Your law, You offered it to every nation and each turned away contemptuously. Israel alone declared itself ready to accept it, to accept You. Where is its reward?<sup>29</sup>

Hasidism develops Luria's understanding of the covenantal partnership. It is a symbiotic relationship: the partners are mutually dependent; consequently, the Zaddik, as the spokesman of his community, is entitled both to reproach God, and to criticise His management of the universe in allowing suffering to exist. Thus, the relationship between God and humanity exists on two levels. On one level, the Zaddik stands totally in awe of God, qua Master of the Universe.<sup>30</sup> On another level, the relationship is deeply personal: God and humanity are partners, each able to criticise the other: both are accountable to each other for the state of the covenantal relationship.

Hasidism therefore personalises the ideas of Lurianic Kabbalah, emphasising both human responsibility and human potential. Through **Devekut** and the mediation of the **Zaddik**, humanity can attain its redemptive goal. However, these positive reinterpretations of Lurianic Kabbalah are paralleled by an acute awareness of the problem of continued suffering. The emphasis upon personal redemption is therefore contextualised within a cosmic battle between good and evil. Hasidism thus combines the cosmic perspective of Kabbalah with an emphasis on the individual. The figure of the **Zaddik** acts as a shield between the individual and the wider cosmic drama. The tenets of Hasidism enabled many to retain their faith despite the events of the Holocaust. However, for many this later event demanded a further reinterpretation of the covenantal tradition.

#### 1. 6. ORTHODOX RESPONSES TO THE HOLOCAUST:

Responses to the Holocaust cover the spectrum suggested by Greenberg. At one extreme, there is Richard Rubenstein's suggestion that the covenant is at an end as a result of the unanswerable counter-testimony of the Holocaust. Alternatively, many thinkers acknowledge the Holocaust's status as counter-testimony, but insist on the retention of covenantal faith, albeit in modified or reinterpreted form. The following chapters on Rubenstein, Eliezer Berkovits, Emil Fackenheim, and Elie Wiesel consider these options at greater length. However, the third of Greenberg's options remains. The final section of this chapter considers some of the Orthodox responses to the Holocaust: those responses which either regard the event as punishment for sin, or as a mystery beyond explanation.

Divine providence provides the context for Orthodox consideration of the Holocaust. A distinction is drawn between general and individual providence. In the context of the former, the Holocaust is a part of the redemptive process leading to the restoration of Israel (understood either politically with reference to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, or spiritually in terms of an

as yet unrealized messianic future). Such debate as there is in Orthodox circles surrounds the relationship between the Holocaust and individual providence. There are a series of possible answers to this question.

The most straightforward response is to interpret the Holocaust as a punishment for sin, understood as either assimilation, Communism, or nationalism. Jewish assimilation signified an abandonment of the Jews' election as the Chosen People: God had called them to be a people apart. Second, there was held to be a disproportionately high level of Jewish involvement in Socialism and Communism. Third, the growth of secular Zionism was a sin, because Jewish attempts to establish the land of Israel impinged upon a divine prerogative: only God could decide when the Return to the land would be accomplished. The Orthodox rabbi, Elchonon Wassermann (1875-1941) suggests that the nature of the Jews' punishment serves to identify their sins. The Jews were punished for nationalism and assimilation. As a consequence, their suffering was at the hands of a nationalist movement, the Nazis, who legally expelled the Jews from the society they were struggling to enter. Wassermann argued that it was useless for the Jews to resist because the Nazis were the instruments of divine punishment.<sup>31</sup> The innocent necessarily suffer along with the guilty: the Jews are punished as a people.

An alternative response views the Holocaust in terms of **Kiddush haShem**. The faithful suffer either because of the sins of others, or for the sake of others. Death is embraced as the will of God, even if its purpose remains unfathomable:

It is clear beyond all doubt that the blessed Holy One is the ruler of the universe, and we must accept the judgement with love. (Rabbi Shmuel David Unger)<sup>32</sup>

Suffering tests the victim's faith. Berkovits' collection, **With God in Hell** illustrates this response. He cites numerous examples of Jews embracing their fate with **emunah**--steadfast faith.<sup>33</sup>

A third strategy combines the two outlined above: the Holocaust marks the "birth-pangs" of the Messiah, and can be interpreted as the historical unfolding of the "rabbinic apocalypse":

In the footsteps of the Messiah insolence will increase, respect will diminish ... the wisdom of the sages will decay, sin fearers will be despised, truth concealed, the young will shame the old, the old will stand in the presence of children.... To whom can we turn for support? [Only] to our father in Heaven. (Mishnah Sotah 9: 15)<sup>34</sup>

The most developed formulation of this response is found in Elchonon Wassermann's, *Ikvosoh Demeshicho*--In the Footsteps of the Messiah. His title refers to the period between exile and redemption; a period when evil is purged in order to pave the way for the coming of the Messiah. Torah and good deeds offer the only means of surviving the "birth-pangs". However, even these are not necessarily sufficient: the innocent suffer because of the evil unleashed to punish Jewish sinners. Wassermann admits that it is impossible to predict how long the "birth-pangs" will last, but he retains the conviction that continued Torah study and good deeds can hasten the end. He also predicts that God's intervention will come at the moment of greatest suffering:

The stronger the persecution of the Jews, the more grounds for their salvation. Now the persecution is of a terrible degree, unlike anything before. Accordingly, God must take up the [plight] of the victims.... It is when Jews are in their greatest crisis, that the birth takes place. It is clear that the contemporary moment is the crisis. This means that the birth is coming closer.

Wassermann therefore attaches great importance to the *Yeshivas* (Talmudic schools), because it is Torah learning which will bring an end to the period of punishment and thus hasten the "birth". The deaths of the innocent serve to hasten the coming of the Messiah:

It would seem that in Heaven we are considered *Tzaddikim* (righteous).... The time is short. The ninth fort [where we will be executed] is near. We must keep in mind truly to sanctify God's name.... God forbid, that any thought should enter anybody's mind which makes the sacrifice (*Korban*) unfit. We now carry out the greatest *Mitzvah*, *Kiddush Hashem*

(sanctification of God's name). The fire which will burn our bodies, is the fire which will resurrect the Jewish people.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, Wassermann interpreted his own death as a means of hastening the "birth" of the Messiah.

Of these Orthodox viewpoints, the first two are still prevalent today: the Holocaust is seen as either punishment for sin, or as the death of six million **Kedoshim**--holy ones. Some Jews see the return to the land of Israel in 1948 as a messianic event, thus undermining the negative impact of the counter-testimony of the Holocaust. However, the non-messianic responses are more prevalent.

#### CONCLUSION:

Although the majority of Orthodox Jews find one of these three interpretations acceptable, non-Orthodox Jews do not. Their response is to adopt one of Greenberg's other two responses to disaster: either to reject belief or to reinterpret the covenant. The former could be said to be the strategy adopted by the majority of secular Jews. Richard Rubenstein comes closest to articulating a theology rooted in this response. Others elect to reinterpret the covenant in order to respond to the Holocaust. In doing so, thinkers such as Emil Fackenheim and Elie Wiesel, are standing in a long tradition of covenantal reinterpretation; a tradition they utilise in formulating a response to the most recent catastrophe in Jewish history: the Holocaust.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Irving Greenberg, 'The Third Great Cycle in Jewish History', **Perspectives** 2, New York: National Jewish Resource Center, 1981, 1.
2. Kenneth R. Seeskin, 'The Reality of Radical Evil', **Judaism**, 1980, 29, 440-53, 450.
3. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, **Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory**, Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1982, 9.
4. Irving Greenberg, 'Judaism and History', 24.
5. Greenberg, 'Third Great Cycle', 5.
6. Greenberg, 'Judaism and History', 32.
7. Louis Jacobs, **A Jewish Theology**, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973, 62.
8. Irving Greenberg, 'Polarity and Perfection', **Face to Face**, 1979, 6, 12-4, 12.
9. The classic illustration of rabbinic awareness of both the continuity and discontinuity between their theology and the biblical covenant is the story of Moses' visit to the academy of Rabbi Akiba:

Moses went [into the academy of Rabbi Akiba] and sat down behind eight rows [of Akiba's disciples]. **Not being able to follow their arguments he was ill at ease**, but when they came to a certain subject and the disciples said to the master "Whence do you know it?" and the latter replied, **"It is a law given to Moses at Sinai,"** he was comforted.

In Yerushalmi, **Zakhor**, 19.
10. Greenberg, 'Third Great Cycle', 7.
11. Richard L. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', **Union Seminary Quarterly Review**, 1970, 25: 4, 421-37, 427.
12. Greenberg, 'Judaism and History', 26.
13. Joseph Dan, **The Teachings of the Hasidim**, New York: Behrman House Inc., 1983.
14. Byron L. Sherwin, 'Elie Wiesel and Jewish Theology', **Judaism**, 1969, 18, 39-52, 47.
15. Isaac Luria, paraphrased by Gershom Scholem, in Jacobs, **A Jewish Theology**, 32.
16. Alan L. Berger, **Crisis and Covenant**, 5.
17. Shabbetai Zvi (1626-76) gained widespread popular support for his messianic claims. Zvi was born in Smyrna, and received a traditional Jewish education, later engaging in study of the Zohar. In 1655, his messiahship was proclaimed by a follower, Nathan Benjamin Levi. Zvi was opposed by the rabbinic authorities of Smyrna, but gained widespread popular support. In 1666, he journeyed to Istanbul, but was arrested and imprisoned by the Grand Vizier. Pilgrims

travelled for all over the world to the prison where he held court. When brought to trial, Shabbetai Zvi was given a choice between conversion or death. He converted to Islam in 1666. Although this conversion discredited him in the eyes of many of his followers, others accepted his explanation that he was obeying a divine command. Nathan suggested that Shabbetai Zvi converted in order to bring about **Tikkun**--to release the divine sparks from the power of evil. The false messiahship of Shabbetai Zvi generated widespread disillusionment.

18. The root of Hasidism is **hesed**--God's loving kindness towards creation, and the devotion to God this inspires in man.

The Talmud defines the Hasid as "he who says: what is mine is yours and what is yours is yours; he who is slow to anger and quick to relent; he who enjoys giving and likes others to give." (*Pirke Aboth*, v: 13-6)

In the second century B.C.E., the Hasidim ("valiant men whose hearts were bound to the Law") fought alongside the Maccabees. They later split with the Hasmonean dynasty over what they saw as a compromise of Torah.

In the thirteenth century C.E., a group called the Hasidim of Ashkenaz (the Holy Men of Germany) flourished in the Rhineland. They produced the **Sefer Hasidim**--the Book of the Devout; a mystical work stressing the importance of silent devotion and prayer.

Hasidism in the modern sense was founded by Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-60), the Master of the Good Name; also known by the acronym, the Besht.

19. Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 34-7.
20. Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality*, trans. Michael Meyer and Hillel Halkin, New York: Schocken Books, 1971, 239.
21. Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire*, (1972), trans. Marion Wiesel, London: Penguin, 1984, 71.
22. Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 133.
23. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 209.
24. See Elie Wiesel, *Four Hasidic Masters and Their Struggle Against Melancholy*, Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978.
25. Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 166.
26. Dan, *The Teachings of Hasidism*, 31.
27. Wiesel, *Souls on Fire*, 46.
28. Ibid. 89.
29. Ibid.



30. Jacobs, **A Jewish Theology**, 179-80.
31. Gershon Greenberg, 'Orthodox Theological Responses to **Kristallnacht**: Chayyim Ozer Grodzensky ('Achiezer') and Elchonon Wassermann', **Holocaust and Genocide Studies**, 1988, 3: 4, 431-442, 433-6.
32. Norman Solomon, 'Jewish Responses to the Holocaust', **Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations**, 4, Birmingham: Selly Oak Colleges, 1988, 8.
33. Eliezer Berkovits, **With God in Hell: Judaism in the Ghettos and Deathcamps**, New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1979.
34. Solomon, 'Jewish Resonses to the Holocaust', 9.
35. Greenberg, 'Orthodox Theological Responses to **Kristallnacht**', 439.

2. RICHARD RUBENSTEIN: "THERE IS NEITHER JUDGEMENT NOR  
JUDGE".

2. 1. INTRODUCTION.

2. 2. THE TRIUMPH OF COUNTER-TESTIMONY OVER COVENANT.

2. 3. "COVENANTLESS JUDAISM".

2. 4. REFLECTIONS ON MASS DEATH.

2. 1. INTRODUCTION:

A generation ago this writer sadly concluded that the Jewish community's traditional mode of constructing a meaningful cosmos could only retain its credibility if the Holocaust were interpreted as God's chastisement of a sinful Israel. Since such a view entails seeing Hitler as a latter-day Nebuchadnezzar and the death camps as God's method of punishment, ideas this writer regarded as beyond obscenity, he had no choice but to conclude that the Jewish community was faced with a theological crisis of unparalleled dimensions.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of Richard Rubenstein's **After Auschwitz** (1966) cannot be underestimated. It was the first major treatment of the theological implications of the Holocaust, and thus can be said to have initiated the subsequent debate. **After Auschwitz** is not only the earliest treatment of this subject, it is arguably the most radical. Other writers, such as Eliezer Berkovits and Emil Fackenheim, attempt to articulate a traditional alternative to Rubenstein's radical conclusions. Thus, their work can be seen as a direct response to **After Auschwitz**, albeit a negative one. Furthermore, the book is important because of the starkness with which the theological challenge of the Holocaust is posed. Rubenstein argues that there is a clear choice: between affirmation of the covenant (which demands that the Holocaust be interpreted as a punishment for sin), and rejection of belief in Israel's election and in God as Lord of History; there are no other alternatives. His own conclusion is that the Holocaust provides such overwhelming counter-testimony that belief in the covenant is no longer possible.

After Auschwitz constitutes the foundations of Rubenstein's subsequent work: his concern is to analyse "the character of religious existence after Auschwitz".<sup>2</sup> Thus, his analysis of the Holocaust forms the basis of his subsequent interest in mysticism and the problems generated by over-population or surplus populations. The Holocaust is foundational to his thinking, but does not provide the subject matter for the bulk of his work. Rubenstein's only other extensive treatment of the Holocaust is **The Cunning of History: Mass Death and the American Future** (1975).<sup>4</sup> This second treatment of the Holocaust differs from the first: it is not concerned with the theological implications of the Holocaust. **The Cunning of History** is a socio-political study of the Holocaust; the dominant theme being the use of technological mass death as a means of eradicating surplus populations. There are therefore two, complementary stages of development in Rubenstein's response to the Holocaust: one theological, and one socio-political.

Before considering the two main components of Rubenstein's response to the Holocaust, it is important to note the hostility generated by his work. The response to Rubenstein's work bears comparison with the hostility which greeted Hannah Arendt's reports on the Eichmann trial.<sup>5</sup> Both are seen as assimilated "outsiders", trespassing on forbidden territory. In Arendt's case, the issue was the question of Jewish collaboration with the Nazis. Rubenstein's rejection of the covenant generated comparable hysteria. He has been likened to a "second Hitler"; while his work has been called a "tragic disaster".<sup>6</sup> Yet Rubenstein's rejection of the covenant parallels the response of millions of secular Jews, in Israel, the United States, and Europe. He is far from alone in finding traditional Judaism untenable after the Holocaust. One of Rubenstein's most vehement critics is Emil Fackenheim; yet Fackenheim echoes Rubenstein's rejection of the traditional theodicy--"for our sins we are punished"--in refusing to interpret the Holocaust as a punishment for sin. Therefore, why the criticism? There

appear to be three answers to this question. First, Rubenstein elaborates his reasons for rejecting traditional Judaism in print. The majority of secular Jews do not do so; they merely allow religious practice to lapse. Second, Rubenstein is a rabbi and refuses to relinquish this office, although many feel that such a move should be the logical consequence of his views.<sup>7</sup> Third, despite his office, Rubenstein is regarded as an "outsider" and a maverick by the wider Jewish community, particularly in America. This fact is partly explained by his background. He is from a fully assimilated, American-Jewish background, with interests in secular philosophy (particularly in Existentialism) and psychology. He brings these interests to bear on his treatment of the Holocaust. Rubenstein is thus held to interpret an quintessentially Jewish experience--the Holocaust--by reference to alien categories. In many ways, the hostility directed against Rubenstein is similar to that directed against insensitive responses to the Holocaust on the part of Christians.<sup>8</sup> The hostility is all the greater because Rubenstein is not literally an outsider, however much he may be perceived as one. Yet despite such criticism, his response cannot be described as insensitive: it stems out of great compassion for his people--Rubenstein constantly repeats that he is compelled to reject the covenant because he refuses to assert that the Holocaust was a divine punishment. If there is any insensitivity, it lies in Rubenstein's posing of a challenge which many would prefer left unsaid.

## 2. 2. THE TRIUMPH OF COUNTER-TESTIMONY OVER COVENANT:

With respect to the doctrine of election within Judaism, (a) if God chose the Jewish people and (b) the major events in the history of that people are ultimately expressions of God's will, we must (c) conclude that God is the ultimate author of Auschwitz. Furthermore, we must conclude that a just and omnipotent God sent Hitler to exterminate<sup>9</sup> his people either to punish them or to correct them.

The seeds of Rubenstein's theological response to the Holocaust were sown in 1961, at a meeting with Heinrich Grüber, a protestant pastor who spent three years in Sachsenhausen as a result of his opposition to Hitler.

Grüber startled Rubenstein by arguing that belief in God as Lord of History, and in Israel's election, could only mean that Hitler was the agent of divine punishment.<sup>10</sup> This encounter led Rubenstein to believe that there was a clear choice: either God is Lord of History and the Jews are His Chosen People (in which case the Holocaust was a punishment for sin), or belief in the covenant is impossible (as it entails acceptance of the above definition of the Holocaust). Therefore, although he cannot accept the views of Elchonon Wassermann, Rubenstein argues that they constitute an authentic, biblical response to the Holocaust.<sup>11</sup>

The meeting with Grüber convinced Rubenstein that the Jewish concept of covenant lay at the root of the problem. It is because the Jews persist in interpreting history in terms of *Heilsgeschichte* that historical counter-testimony carries such weight. He argues that covenant theology necessarily sees historical counter-testimony as expressions of the will of God:

Either such a God is a sadist who inflicts pain because he enjoys it or he has a reason for the pain he inflicts. The only morally defensible motive for a superior to inflict pain on an inferior would be punitive chastisement which has as its purpose altering the victims' mode of behavior.<sup>12</sup>

For Rubenstein, the Holocaust can be interpreted only as a punishment for sin within the framework of covenant. Any other alternative is dismissed as "gloss".<sup>13</sup> He rejects the strategies of Wiesel and Fackenheim, on the grounds that they depict God as a "cosmic sadist" who toys with His creation.<sup>14</sup> Viewed in terms of Greenberg's three possible responses to disaster, Rubenstein offers a choice between the first and the third. Either historical disaster does not have the power to effect faith: it can be interpreted by reference to the traditional theodicy of "for our sins are we punished"; or historical counter-testimony is deemed sufficient to end faith in the covenant. Reinterpretation of the covenant is no longer considered a viable option. In effect, Rubenstein transforms Greenberg's second response into a subsidiary

of the third. Reinterpretation becomes necessary only after belief in the covenant has been rejected: it is necessary to deconstruct covenantal language in a way that is meaningful to covenantless Judaism.

Rubenstein's response to the Holocaust is to reject belief in God as Lord of History and in the Jews' election. He does so because he refuses to accept that the Holocaust was a punishment for sin. Whereas many thinkers see the establishment of the State of Israel as proof of the continuing validity of the covenant, Rubenstein argues the exact opposite.<sup>14</sup> The establishment of the State of Israel only proved possible because the Jews relied on their own efforts, rather than on divine intervention. Rubenstein cites the increasingly secular character of Jewish life in Israel to support his argument. Again Rubenstein appeals to logic: interpreting Eretz Israel as proof of divine agency demands that the same be said of the Holocaust. God is either the author of both events, or of neither. The rejection of belief in divine election is foundational to Jewish existence in Israel:

What is happening in Israel has nothing to do with the cosmic drama of God's involvement with the Jewish people. The Israeli fights his own battle, not somebody else's.<sup>15</sup>

To interpret events in Israel as part of divine providence is doubly false. First, because it implies that the covenant between God and the Jews is still a valid formula. Second, because it misrepresents the attitudes of modern Israelis. Rubenstein's response to the Holocaust is thus to argue that there is no difference between Jews and other religious or ethnic groups: they are no longer a people set apart by God.

Rubenstein's rejection of covenantal faith partly explains the controversy generated by his work. The starkness with which he poses the dilemma facing the religious Jew after the Holocaust is certainly welcome. However, there is a suspicion that this starkness is attained at the expense of caricaturing covenantal faith. Rubenstein acknowledges that Jewish faith centres on the

dialectic of promise and counter-testimony, but he fails to treat this fact seriously. He caricatures the dialectic in terms of an alternative between suffering as a punishment for sin and the rejection of the covenant, as a protest against the imputation of sin to the Six Million. However, numerous thinkers have succeeded in retaining the covenant while rejecting the traditional theodicy. Rubenstein follows the rabbis in scanning history for its theological significance, but differs in his willingness to sacrifice covenantal faith. He ignores the long tradition within Judaism of covenantal reinterpretation in the face of historical counter-testimony. Would he dismiss Rabbinic, Lurianic and Hasidic thinking as a "gloss"? The answer is presumably affirmative. Wiesel and Fackenheim are following the traditional course in attempting to reinterpret the covenant in a way that incorporates the radical counter-testimony of the Holocaust.

A corollary of this criticism involves Rubenstein's use of evidence. He rejects the covenant purely on the basis of the Holocaust, only invoking the tradition to point to precedents for this, as in the case of the Talmudic heretic, Elisha ben Abuya. The continued existence and development of Judaism despite historical counter-testimony is not admitted as evidence in support of the validity of the covenantal promise:

Rubenstein errs in viewing the entirety of Jewish existence through a Holocaust prism.... For Rubenstein, post-Holocaust Jewish existence is radically discontinuous with all preceding forms of Jewish expression.<sup>16</sup>

There is a vast difference between Rubenstein's approach and that of the Rabbis in the aftermath of the twin disasters of 70 and 135. The Rabbis emphasised both the radically new character of their situation and their theology, but still continued to insist on the continuity between their ideas and the Mosaic covenant. Rubenstein not only emphasises the discontinuity of ideas, he also reads this discontinuity back into the tradition. Thus, his own rejection of the covenant finds its precedent in Elisha ben Abuya's declaration that "there is neither

judgement nor judge". He also argues that this recognition was present, but suppressed, in biblical theology:

Since there is nothing to indicate that biblical man was less intelligent or insightful than men in our generation, we have no reason to believe that biblical man was incapable of drawing conclusions similar to those which Elisha ben Abuya drew. It is my opinion that the author(s) repressed their insights because they were fearful of the price to be paid for living in a spiritual and metaphysical wasteland.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Rubenstein's acceptance, albeit in reinterpreted form, of the dialectic of promise and counter-testimony proves misleading. His theology does not arise out of the tension between the covenant and the Holocaust. Rather, he interprets Jewish theology under the existential impact of the Holocaust. Thus, the tradition only plays a passive role in Rubenstein's approach, as opposed to the active role played by covenantal theology in the dialectic of promise and counter-testimony. Rubenstein's work is not in dialogue with the tradition, as is the case with Wiesel.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the tradition is mined to provide support for an already established position.<sup>19</sup>

The argument outlined above can be illustrated by reference to Rubenstein's treatment of **Eretz Israel**. As the dialectic is traditionally understood, historical disaster stands as counter-testimony, whereas success or prosperity is equated with covenant promise. Rubenstein is prepared to accept the Holocaust as counter-testimony, but he refuses to allow the establishment of **Eretz Israel** to count as promise. Is such a strategy logically permissible? Rubenstein argues that it is, claiming that the State of Israel reflects the fact that Jews no longer expect divine intervention on their behalf. However, this expectation had no place in Rabbinic or Lurianic thinking. The primary hope of divine intervention lay in messianic expectation. Other than this, the major emphasis was upon human responsibility for **Tikkun**; an emphasis which, by definition, presumes the impossibility of divine intervention. Rubenstein's failure to engage with the tradition thus leads him to distort the covenantal



understanding of divine power. The drive to establish the State of Israel does not necessarily include belief in the covenant. It points to an awareness of the Jews' responsibility for their own fate. However, such an awareness was already theologically present within the Jewish tradition. The novelty lies in the widespread belief that Diaspora existence was no longer tenable after the Holocaust, with a consequent increase in support--both Jewish and non-Jewish--for Zionism.

To conclude, if the dialectic between promise and counter-testimony is to be taken seriously, then it is essential that positive, as well as negative evidence be admissible. The Holocaust is undeniably negative. However, there were numerous expressions of faith by the victims. Such faith cannot be ignored. Hence the insistence of the majority of Jewish thinkers that a response to the Holocaust must incorporate both the faith and loss of belief generated by the Event.<sup>20</sup> Nor can the positive content of Jewish history be ignored. Rubenstein errs in concentrating solely on the negative side of the equation.

## 2. 3. "COVENANTLESS JUDAISM":<sup>21</sup>

Though I believe that a void stands where once we experienced God's presence, I do not think Judaism has lost its meaning or its power.... Judaism is the way in which we share the decisive times and crises of life through the traditions of our inherited community.<sup>22</sup>

There are two dimensions to Rubenstein's analysis of Judaism. The first concerns his understanding of God; the second the way that understanding informs Jewish religious life. However, this analysis of Judaism is in a state of flux: Rubenstein has substantially modified the views outlined in *After Auschwitz*.

In *After Auschwitz*, Rubenstein argues that "God-is-dead"--that is belief in God as Lord of History is no longer tenable. In place of the covenant, he offers a picture of an essentially meaningless universe. He follows Camus in arguing that the only meaning is that created and

imposed on the universe by humanity. Rubenstein's theological vision is bleak:

We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God?<sup>23</sup>

In this reading, God is defined as "Holy Nothingness".<sup>24</sup> It is this definition that provides the basis for an increasingly positive understanding of God. Whereas, in **After Auschwitz**, God is viewed in primarily negative terms (either as dead or absent), there is an increasingly positive, mystical understanding of God in Rubenstein's later work. God is dead, in the sense that He is not an active power intervening in history on behalf of a particular people. Instead, God as Holy Nothingness is the mystical source of existence:

God is spoken of as the **Holy Nothingness**. When God is thus designated, he is conceived of as the ground and source of all existence. To speak of God as **Holy Nothingness** is not to suggest that he is a void. On the contrary, he is an indivisible **plenum** so rich that all existence derives from his very essence. God as the **Nothing** is not absence of being but superfluity of being.<sup>25</sup>

The obvious criticism of Rubenstein's position is that there is no longer anything distinctively Jewish about it. If this is the case, why does he persist in emphasising the importance of Jewish religious practice?

There are two aspects to Rubenstein's understanding of the religious life: a call for a return to Paganism, and for a deconstruction of Jewish practice. In **After Auschwitz**, Rubenstein interprets the return to **Eretz Israel** as a return to Paganism. The return to the land not only symbolises Jewish rejection of the covenant, it also illustrates a return to a form of fertility worship. The Jews, particularly in the **Kibbutzim**, return to an existence dominated by the fertility cycle. The establishment of **Eretz Israel** will lead to an embracing of nature:

I am a pagan. To be a pagan means to find again one's roots as a child of Earth and to see one's own existence as wholly and totally an earthly existence. It means once again to understand that for mankind the true divinities are the gods of

earth, not the high gods of the sky; the gods of space and place, not the gods of time; the gods of home and hearth, not the gods of wandering.<sup>26</sup>

However, the establishment of Eretz Israel has not led to a growth in Paganism: the rejection of covenant faith has resulted in a widespread secularism. The **Kibbutzim**, rather than being the fount of a new Paganism, are in economic crisis. The majority of Jews, rather than returning to the land, have chosen to remain in the Diaspora. As a result, although Rubenstein has not abandoned his appeal to Paganism, he has placed increasing emphasis on mysticism, while acknowledging that the majority of religious Jews will never accept his views, preferring instead to accept the traditional theodicy of suffering as punishment for sin.

The second, and more consistent, element in Rubenstein's analysis of religious life is his attempt to deconstruct Jewish practice. He argues that rejection of the covenant need not entail the rejection of Judaism. Indeed, rejection of the covenant renders Jewish practice all the more important:

I believe that in a world devoid of God we need Torah, tradition, and the religious community far more than in a world where God's presence was meaningfully experienced.<sup>27</sup>

Religious community is all that remains of the Jewish religious framework. In 'Covenant and Holocaust', Rubenstein appeals to biblical scholarship to argue that the covenant was primarily a social, rather than a religious, institution. Its purpose was to bind together a disparate group of tribes by appealing to a common historical experience, thus creating a code of moral obligation.<sup>28</sup> He argues that it is legitimate to deconstruct Jewish practice in the light of this fact. Festivals such as the Passover can be deconstructed and understood as re-enactments of this communal binding together. The **Bar-Mitzvah** can be understood as a rite of passage, initiating a child into full group-membership. The logical conclusion of this process lies in Rubenstein's assertion that the individual Jew is free to

accept or reject any, or all, of Torah's 613 *mitzvot* (commandments). The individual Jew accepts those commandments which he finds meaningful for his existence. Thus, in line with his rejection of the covenant, the sacred origin of Torah is denied. The Torah derives its authoritative status from the fact that Jews choose to make it the basis of their religious life.

However, does a deconstructed Judaism provide a meaningful basis for religious life. Those forms of Judaism which emphasise Torah observance, i.e. Orthodox Judaism, insist upon both belief in the covenant and the divine origin of Torah. Can Jewish practice maintain a vital existence without acceptance of these two root claims? The current crisis within Reform Judaism, particularly in the United States, suggests that it cannot:

The serious crisis in contemporary Reform Judaism is witness to the limitations of this view while the return to more traditional forms and the reinclusion of more *mitzvot* into Reform Judaism is evidence of the at least tacit admission that the "translation" technique by which Judaism is translated into non-Jewish criteria, has many negative consequences both for the quality of one's Jewish life as well as for Jewish survival. Judaism as a community of shared values dies, as recent history indicates, under these procedures.<sup>29</sup>

This criticism by Steven Katz is borne out by the fact that the vital area of contemporary Judaism is undoubtedly the Orthodox. By contrast, Reform Judaism, both in Israel and the United States is going through a period of crisis as a consequence of decreasing numbers.

The inevitable conclusion is that Rubenstein's definition of religious life is insufficiently Jewish to be attractive. Despite his emphasis on the social function of religion, he fails to acknowledge the fact that an important part of this function is the provision of a clear sense of identity. Ironically, the success of covenantal Judaism lies precisely in its provision of such an identity; the very area where Rubenstein's proposals are weakest. Second, Rubenstein again offers a

caricature of contemporary Judaism: those who reject his proposals do not necessarily embrace the traditional theodicy of suffering as a punishment for sin. This definition can neither be applied to secular Jews, nor to those whose religious ideas parallel the responses of Berkovits, Fackenheim, or Wiesel.

#### 2. 4. REFLECTIONS ON MASS DEATH:

With the publication of **The Cunning of History** (1975), Rubenstein turned his attention to a socio-political analysis of the Holocaust. The reason for this transition is twofold. First, he argues that the uniqueness of the Holocaust lies in the fact that the Jews' traditional responses to persecution: martyrdom and conversion were no longer viable options. Second, the theological significance of the Holocaust cannot be confined to reconciling the covenant with radical evil. The Holocaust profoundly challenges Jewish ethics, specifically the claim that humanity is created in the image of God and that there is a consensus concerning human rights.

The most controversial section in **The Cunning of History** concentrates on the role of the **Judenräte**--the Jewish Councils--in the Holocaust. Rubenstein's argument builds upon his understanding of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. The event was unique because it denied the Jews the possibility of martyrdom or conversion. The Jews traditionally responded to persecution by attempting to buy off their persecutors, or by petitioning local authorities (either secular or clerical) for mercy. If these strategies failed, the Jews could either convert (as in Medieval Spain, in the case of the **Marranos**), or they could embrace death in faith (following the example of early martyrs, such as Rabbi Akiba or Rabbi Ishmael). The Holocaust was unique among Jewish historical catastrophe because these options were no longer available:

Auschwitz was qualitatively different from other Jewish catastrophes. In all other misfortunes it was usually possible for Jews to remain alive either through surrender or apostasy.... The Germans

deprived the Jews of the final dignity of  
martyrdom.<sup>30</sup>

Martyrdom can only be applied to the Holocaust if it is reinterpreted to refer to those who died because they were Jewish, as in the description of the Six Million as **Kedoshim**.

In defining the Holocaust as unique in this way, Rubenstein does not deny the role played by Christian theological anti-Judaism. Christian anti-Jewish teaching contributed to the "acceptability" of the Nazi choice of the Jew as scape-goat.<sup>31</sup> However, Rubenstein points to the need to recognise both the continuity and the discontinuity between Christian anti-Judaism and Nazi racial anti-Semitism. To recognise the latter is not to excuse the former. The discontinuity lay in the racial definition of Judaism: once Jewishness was defined racially, rather than religiously, conversion no longer constituted an alternative. Nazi persecution differed from religious persecution--it was inexorable:

Where Christianity usually rested content in seeking to convince the Jews of the error of their ways and to seek error's remedy in conversion, Nazism had no interest in regarding the Jews as anything but objects to be exterminated. Nothing the Jews could do by way of confession, submission, surrender, betrayal or apostasy could have altered their destined roles in the Nazi system.<sup>32</sup>

The lack of an adequate response to the Holocaust by both Jews and Christians can be explained in part by the failure to recognise the discontinuity between Nazi anti-Semitism and previous anti-Jewish policies.

This failure was particularly catastrophic for the Jewish community in that it hampered attempts at organised resistance. The **Judenräte**, in mediating between the Jews' and their aggressors, were reacting in time-honoured fashion, and in a way that had been successful in averting or minimising such threats in the past. Initially, the Holocaust was perceived in terms of the recent past; an illusion actively encouraged by the Nazis: the Jews were to be exploited as a labour force. Rubenstein suggests

that the Nazis exploited the fact that Jewish Diaspora existence was a "culture of submission and surrender".<sup>33</sup> Jewish history could point to few examples of armed resistance; the majority of which were unsuccessful, as in the case of the revolts against Rome in 65 and 135. Emphasis was placed on those who accepted death in faith, rather than those who resisted. The Jewish communities therefore had little precedent for active opposition to oppression:

At no time in the two-thousand year history of diaspora Judaism before the Holocaust were Jews prepared to resist unto death, although they often chose death rather than betray their faith.<sup>34</sup>

Rubenstein is careful to point out that this is not a criticism of the Judenräte. He is attempting to identify the factors which informed the Jewish response to Nazism, one of which was a widespread failure to recognise the unique character of Nazi anti-Semitism; a failure which was understandable in view of the parallel continuity with Christian anti-Judaism.

A clear understanding of the uniqueness of the Holocaust is a pre-requisite for any theological response. If it is claimed that the Holocaust is a radically new event in Jewish history demanding a new, or reinterpreted, theology, it is essential to be clear precisely why this is the case. As we shall see, the confusion in Eliezer Berkovits' response largely stems from a lack of clarity concerning the uniqueness, or otherwise, of the Holocaust. In Rubenstein's analysis, the uniqueness of the Holocaust is twofold. First, it excluded the possibility of conversion or martyrdom. Second, its essential modernity undermines the fundamental claims of Jewish ethics concerning the value of humanity as created in the image of God.

**The Cunning of History** is dominated by Rubenstein's claim that:

the Holocaust bears witness to the advance of civilization ... to the point at which large scale massacre is no longer a crime and the state's sovereign powers are such that millions can be

stripped of their rights and condemned to the world of the living dead.<sup>35</sup>

Such a claim poses a twofold challenge to both Jewish and Christian ethics. First, technically speaking, the Nazis committed no crime in the Holocaust, hence the creation of the charge "crimes against humanity" at the Nuremberg Trials. The Holocaust therefore illustrates that "human rights" have no legal status; the belief in the innate dignity of humanity is a ethical / theological category. Second, the Holocaust makes a mockery of the assertion that humanity is created in the image of God: human dignity only exists in as far as it is allowed to exist.

Rubenstein pays greater attention to the first of these two points. He emphasises the fact that the Nazis formed a constitutionally elected Government. The Holocaust must be seen as:

the first attempt by a modern, legally constituted state to pursue a policy of bureaucratically organized genocide both within and beyond its own frontiers.<sup>36</sup>

In carrying out their anti-Jewish policies, the Nazis employed a highly developed state bureaucracy, and relied upon the co-operation of the army, the police force, industry, the medical professions, and the transport networks. The Holocaust is therefore a product of modern technology and bureaucracy. The death-camps themselves were geared to the industrialised production of mass death. As far as criminal law is concerned, the whole process was entirely legal: the Nazis stripped the Jews of citizenship, and then changed the Nationality Law in order to strip them of Reich nationality; the Jews lost their rights of nationality automatically upon deportation. On arrival in the death-camps the Jews were stateless, and therefore without legal rights. The problems raised by the creation of a new criminal category--"crimes against humanity"--to cover the Holocaust are acute.<sup>37</sup> Rubenstein suggests that human rights are thus shown to be dependent on the individual being a recognised member of a group--the Nuremberg Laws removed this recognition from the Jews:



they became a racial group with no legal rights. The loss of legal rights rendered the Jews a "surplus population", and as such they were expendable: either as a slave-labour force, or as a target for extermination:

The history of the twentieth century has taught us that people who are rendered permanently superfluous are eventually condemned to segregated precincts of the living dead or are exterminated outright.<sup>38</sup>

The Stalinist purges and the Soviet system of labour-camps provide further illustrations of this principle.

The corollary of the above is that human dignity is not viewed as an innate characteristic. As far as Rubenstein is concerned it is irrelevant whether humanity is created in the image of God: this fact had no bearing on events in the Holocaust:

Theologians or moralists may argue that all men possess some God-given irreducible measure of dignity, but such talk will neither deter future emulators of the Nazis nor comfort realistically their victims.<sup>39</sup>

Rubenstein suggests that the breakthrough came with the mechanised slaughter of the First World War. Once the enemy or victim becomes faceless, there is less need for a moral code: engagement with the enemy / victim becomes defined in abstract terms. He argues that modernity is marked by an absence of limits. When everything is possible, human rights become a luxury. The Holocaust was a bureaucratic problem that was solved when "gas chambers with a capacity for killing two thousand people at a time were installed at Auschwitz".<sup>40</sup> Rubenstein ties this argument in with his interpretation of the Judenräte. The Nazis' bureaucratic success lay in organizing "an entire people for its own extermination".<sup>41</sup>

Rubenstein therefore argues that the Holocaust should be seen as the "shadowside" of modernity. The positive achievements of modernity are obvious; the Holocaust suggests that these successes are only attained at a price: the Holocaust was only possible because of the **advance** in civilization, in terms of technology and bureaucracy. As a consequence, he suggests that the

Holocaust should undermine optimism concerning the beneficial effects of civilization and human nature.<sup>42</sup>

CONCLUSION:

Rubenstein's work is notable both for its clarity and its intellectual honesty. He poses the theological problem of the Holocaust with considerable force. In one sense, the hostility that his work has aroused can be seen as a compliment: it has touched a nerve within the American Jewish community.

Rubenstein's distance from the Jewish tradition, both in terms of background and education, has both positive and negative repercussions. Positive, because such distancing enables him to be more open to the work of those such as Arendt, who are viewed with suspicion by the Jewish community. In *The Cunning of History*, Rubenstein strives to present a detached portrayal of the mechanisms governing the actions of both victims and perpetrators. He asserts that such detachment is an essential pre-requisite for writing on this subject: all feelings of sympathy for the victim or hostility towards the perpetrators must be excluded.<sup>42</sup> Although it is arguable whether such extreme detachment is either possible or desirable, a certain degree of detachment from the Jewish community's concerns is essential for a treatment of the subject of the *Judenräte* and Jewish co-operation with the Nazis. Writers, such as Berkovits or Fackenheim, who are more in tune with the wider Jewish community are noticeably more reluctant to interpret Nazism within the wider framework of totalitarianism. Fackenheim in particular is critical of Rubenstein's analysis of the Holocaust in terms of the twentieth century phenomenon of mass death.<sup>43</sup> Rubenstein's awareness of non-Jewish, or purely secular treatments of the Holocaust allows him to place the Event in an interdisciplinary context. He is also acutely aware of the need for such a context: a religious response to the Holocaust demands a clear answer to the question of the Event's uniqueness. If the Holocaust is deemed unique, such a definition requires an interpretation of Nazism, which in

turn requires an awareness of the political and historical debate over the nature of Nazism; the role played by anti-Semitism in the Nazi programme; and the nature of the Holocaust itself.<sup>44</sup> The clarity of Rubenstein's argument stems, in part, from the separation of his theological response to the Holocaust and his definition of uniqueness. This progression stands in contrast to Berkovits (who only offers a theological definition of Nazism) and Fackenheim (who offers a theological interpretation of the Holocaust, and only gradually develops a historical reading of Nazism).

The negative effect of Rubenstein's distance from traditional Judaism is evident in his treatment of the dialectic of covenantal promise and counter-testimony. He never acknowledges the significance of theological reinterpretation under the impact of historical disaster. Rubenstein regards the alternative as a clear-cut choice between the theodicy of suffering as a punishment for sin and the rejection of the covenant. However, this was never the only alternative: Jewish theology has never been unequivocally centred around this theodicy; there are alternatives even in the Bible. If Rubenstein's analysis is accepted, then the developments of Rabbinic theology, Lurianic Kabbalah, and Hasidism would have to be dismissed as "gloss". The major developments in Jewish theology stem from the belief that reinterpretation of the covenant is a valid response to historical counter-testimony: belief has to remain credible by continually adapting itself to new situations. Those who attempt to reinterpret the covenant in the aftermath of the Holocaust are thus following a deeply Jewish impulse. To reject belief as no longer feasible after the Holocaust is an option to be considered after attempting to reinterpret the covenant, not before. In Rubenstein's interpretation, the dialectic of promise and counter-testimony has not broken down, it has never been deemed to exist, except in the stereotyped form of counter-testimony as punishment for sin. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Rubenstein reads a rejection of the covenant back into Jewish history: if the theodicy of "for

our sins we are punished" was the only alternative, rejection of the covenant would have been more widespread in the past. The fact that such rejection was not widespread was due to the existence of an alternative, in the form of reinterpretation of the covenant.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Richard L. Rubenstein, 'In Response to Professor Ophir', *Tikkun*, 1987, 2: 1, 66-7, 67.
2. Richard L. Rubenstein, 'Auschwitz and Covenant Theology', *Christian Century*, 1969, 86: 21, 716-8, 718.
3. See, Richard L. Rubenstein, *Morality and Eros*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970; and Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Age of Triage: Fear and Hope in an Overcrowded World*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1983.
4. Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History: Mass Death and the American Future*, New York: Harper & Row, 1975. Similar ideas govern Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Legacy of the Holocaust*, London: SCM, 1987.
5. The Jewish community was primarily hostile to Arendt's coverage of the Eichmann trial. Controversy centred on her use of the term 'the banality of evil', and her reference to the role of the *Judenräte*. See, 'Postscript' in the paperback edition of Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (1963), London: Penguin, 1977, 280-98; the exchange between Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem in Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, ed. Ron H. Feldman, New York: Grove Press, 1978; Dagme Barnouw, 'The Secularity of Evil: Hannah Arendt and the Eichmann Controversy', *Modern Judaism*, 1983, 3, 75-94.
6. For discussion of the widespread criticism of Rubenstein by the American Jewish community, see Michael Berenbaum, *The Vision of the Void: Theological Reflections on the Work of Elie Wiesel*, Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1979, 160-71; Jacob Neusner, 'The Implications of the Holocaust', *Journal of Religion*, 1973, 53: 3, 293-308, 298-9; Michael Wyschogrod, 'Faith and the Holocaust', *Judaism*, 1970, 20: 3, 286-94, 287.
7. The hostility directed against Rubenstein, qua rabbi, rejecting the covenant could be compared to that directed against clergy who criticise traditional Christianity, such as Don Cupitt or David Jenkins.
8. Obvious recent examples of Christian insensitivity over the Holocaust being the beatification of Edith Stein and the establishment of a Carmelite monastery at Auschwitz.
9. Rubenstein, 'Auschwitz and Covenant Theology', 717.
10. See the essay, 'The Dean and the Chosen People' in Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966. See also Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 308-11.

11. Richard L. Rubenstein, 'Covenant and Holocaust', **Remembering for the Future**, Theme I, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988, 662-71, 662-5.
12. Richard L. Rubenstein, 'Some Perspectives on Religious Faith after Auschwitz', in eds. Franklin Littell and Hubert Locke, **The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust**, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974, 256-68, 261.
13. Rubenstein, 'Covenant and Holocaust', 666.
14. Rubenstein's interpretation of the establishment of the State of Israel differs radically from that of Eliezer Berkovits and Emil Fackenheim, views which are discussed in the following two chapters.
15. Richard L. Rubenstein, 'God as Cosmic Sadist: In Reply to Emil Fackenheim', **Christian Century**, July 29, 1970, 921-3, 923.
16. Alan L. Berger, 'Holocaust and History: A Theological Reflection', **Journal of Ecumenical Studies**, 1988, 25: 2, 194-211, 198.
17. Richard L. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', 427.
18. See Elie Wiesel, **Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends**, New York: Random House, 1976; **Four Hasidic Masters and Their Struggle Against Melancholy**.
19. Steven T. Katz, **Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought**, New York: New York University Press, 1983, 184-5.
20. Such a position is adopted, at least in principle, by Eliezer Berkovits, Emil Fackenheim, Irving Greenberg and Elie Wiesel.
21. The phrase "covenantless Judaism" is employed by Alan Berger to describe Rubenstein's position. See Berger, 'Holocaust and History', 197.
22. Rubenstein, **After Auschwitz**, 153-4.
23. Ibid. 13.
24. Ibid. 154.
25. Rubenstein, **Morality and Eros**, 185-6, in Rubenstein and Roth, **Approaches to Auschwitz**, 315.
26. Rubenstein, 'Some Perspectives on Religious Faith After Auschwitz', 267.
27. Rubenstein, **After Auschwitz**, 152-3.
28. Rubenstein, 'Covenant and Holocaust', 666-8.
29. Katz, **Post-Holocaust Dialogues**, 193.
30. Rubenstein, 'Auschwitz and Covenant Theology', 717.
31. Rubenstein, 'Holocaust and Covenant' 668.
32. Rubenstein, **After Auschwitz**, 3.
33. Rubenstein, **The Cunning of History**, 71.
34. Ibid.

35. Ibid. 91.
36. Ibid. 6-7.
37. See Arendt, **Eichmann in Jerusalem**, 253-79; Douglas P. Lackey, 'Extraordinary Evil or Common Malevolence? Evaluating the Jewish Holocaust', **Journal of Applied Philosophy**, 1986, 3: 2, 167-81.
38. Rubenstein, **The Cunning of History**, 96.
39. Rubenstein, 'Some Perspectives on Religious Faith after Auschwitz', 265.
40. Rubenstein, **The Cunning of History**, 25.
41. Ibid. 76.
42. For an analogous argument, see George Steiner, **In Bluebeard's Castle: Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture**, London: Faber & Faber, 1974.
43. Rubenstein, **The Cunning of History**, 2.
44. Emil L. Fackenheim, **The Jewish Return into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem**, New York: Schocken Books, 1978, 90-101.
45. See Christopher R. Browning, **Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution**, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985; Michael Marrus, **The Holocaust in History**, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988; Gordon Craig, 'Facing Up to the Nazis', **New York Review of Books**, February 2, 1988, 10-5.

3. ELIEZER BERKOVITS: FAITH AFTER THE HOLOCAUST.

3. 1. INTRODUCTION.

3. 2. FAITH HISTORY AND POWER HISTORY.

3. 3. **GALUT**: ISRAEL IN EXILE.

3. 4. **HESTER PANIM**: THE HIDING OF GOD'S FACE.

3. 5. WITH GOD IN HELL.

3. 6. THE UNIQUENESS OF THE HOLOCAUST.

3. 1. INTRODUCTION:

Eliezer Berkovits' response to the Holocaust marks the opposite extreme to Richard Rubenstein. The latter argues that the Holocaust bears witness to the end of covenantal faith; the former asserts that it poses no radical challenge to religious faith: the Holocaust poses, albeit on a drastically larger scale, the same challenge as the death of a single innocent child. Whereas, Rubenstein represents the third of Greenberg's responses to historical counter-testimony, Berkovits represents the first. As such, Berkovits' work provides an illustration of the inherent limitations of any Orthodox response to the Holocaust. He initially asserts that the Holocaust is historically, but not theologically unique. However, there is increasing ambivalence over the latter half of this assertion. In effect, Berkovits is torn between the claim that the Holocaust is not theologically unique, and his recognition that the event has had a profound existential impact on Jewish religious consciousness. He responds by attempting to construct a theodicy that is capable of meeting the challenge of the Holocaust, yet relies solely on the existing resources of the tradition.

Berkovits' strategy reflects his position as an "insider", as opposed to Rubenstein's status as "outsider". He responds to the Holocaust by turning to resources within the Jewish tradition, rather than calling upon the external resources of Freudian psychology and Existentialist philosophy. This strict reliance on the existing tradition is both a strength and a weakness. A



strength, because unlike Rubenstein, Berkovits is acutely aware of the spectrum of traditional response to historical disaster; a weakness, because his reliance on the tradition tends to blind him to the validity of the concerns of the non-Orthodox. Thus, he dismisses the response of Rubenstein as "shadowy and unreal", failing to acknowledge the significance of the questions he raises concerning the morality of the traditional theodicy "for our sins we are punished" as a response to the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> Berkovits rejects this theodicy, but fails to recognise that in doing so he is inadvertently agreeing with Rubenstein, at least in part.<sup>2</sup> The major weakness of Berkovits' approach is that, in his concern to defend the tradition against the radical challenge of Rubenstein, he refuses to listen to the questions being raised. Thus, his response, although doubtless convincing to those who hold similar beliefs, fails to address the concerns of the non-Orthodox: Berkovits' response is for the benefit of "insiders", rather than an attempt to make such a response convincing to a non-Orthodox audience.

Berkovits' response to the Holocaust takes a deeply traditional form: he offers an interpretation of the covenant in terms of Israel's function in history as the witness to God's presence. The Holocaust is interpreted within the context of this covenantal reading of history, and particularly in terms of Berkovits' understanding of **Galut**--exile. Israel's history reflects the divine exile: God has to withdraw from creation in order to provide humanity with the freedom necessary to existence. Similarly, the Jews live in exile "among the nations". The Holocaust is interpreted as the confrontation of "power history" (the nations) and "faith history" (the Jews as the witnesses to God's presence in creation). Berkovits' response to the Holocaust is therefore to construct a theodicy on the basis of a form of the free-will defence and the biblical concept of **Hester Panim**--the hiding of God's face. God has to withdraw from history in order to allow humanity to exercise free-will. Freedom is necessarily open to abuse; abuse that culminates in the

Holocaust. Berkovits' theodicy combines with his reading of covenantal theodicy in his distinction between "authentic" and "inauthentic" Jews. The former are the pious Jews of Eastern Europe who embraced death as providing an opportunity for **Kiddush haShem**; the latter are the assimilated Jews of Western Europe. In effect, Berkovits interprets the Holocaust as a demonic attack on the spiritual values of "faith history" as typified by "authentic" Jews in the ghettos and deathcamps of Eastern Europe. Throughout, there is a constant ambivalence over the status of the Holocaust. Berkovits is reluctant to grant the theological uniqueness of the Holocaust, but is drawn towards this position almost in spite of himself.

### 3. 2. FAITH HISTORY AND POWER HISTORY:

The very existence of the Jewish people is suggestive of another dimension of reality and meaning in which the main preoccupations of the man of power history<sub>3</sub> are adjudged futile and futureless in the long run.<sup>3</sup>

Berkovits agrees with Elchonon Wassermann in interpreting the covenant as a call for the Jews to exist as a people living apart. The Jews are elected and set apart, to act as witnesses to the divine presence in history. He argues that history is only possible because God withdraws His manifest presence, thus allowing human freedom. The presence of God is indirect: the Jews as Chosen People symbolise the hidden divine presence. If the Jews are faithful to the covenant, they bear witness to this hidden presence. If they are faithless, knowledge of the divine presence is lost. Berkovits thus interprets history as a confrontation between two forces. The dominant force is "power history", typified by Christianity and Western culture. Berkovits regards "power history" as essentially aggressive and imperialistic. By contrast, "faith history", as typified by the Jews, relies upon faith in God to ensure survival. Jewish survival, despite centuries of persecution, is the best proof that the Jews represent "faith history":

The survival of the Jew, his capacity for revival after catastrophe such as had eliminated mighty nations and empires, indicate the mysterious

intrusion of a spiritual dimension into the history of man.<sup>4</sup>

Anti-Semitism marks the recurrent attempt of Christianity qua "power history" to destroy this "spiritual dimension". The Jews, by their very existence, pass judgement on the values of Christianity.

Berkovits stands out among Jewish thinkers because of the depth of his hostility to Christianity. He argues that the Jews provided the means by which God tested Christian culture. The existence of Christian anti-Judaism marked Christianity's rejection of the "spiritual dimension" in history. Hostility to the Jews thus becomes hostility to God's purposes. The Holocaust, as the culmination of Christian anti-Jewish teaching, illustrates the moral bankruptcy of both Christianity and Western culture. Berkovits thus lays the entire responsibility for the Holocaust at Christianity's door. The lack of widespread opposition to the Holocaust undermines any Christian claim to "moral and spiritual leadership in the world".<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Holocaust is a tragedy for both Judaism and Christianity. It is a tragedy for Jews because of their status as victims. It is a tragedy for Christians because it marks the end of any claim to "dignity and respect".<sup>6</sup> Berkovits rejects any Jewish-Christian dialogue on the subject of the Holocaust: there is nothing that Christians can say to Jews. Dialogue may be possible a long time in the future, but only if Christianity illustrates its repentance in deeds toward the Jewish people:

For Jewry as a whole, an honest fraternal dialogue with Christianity is at this stage emotionally impossible. The majority of Jews still mourn in a very personal sense. In a hundred years, perhaps, depending on Christian deeds toward Jews we may be emotionally ready for the dialogue.

The apparent increase in Christian tolerance towards other religions is merely a reflection of the Church's concern at its own minority status. Tolerance is a reaction to a changed balance of power: Christianity only offers tolerance to others because it depends upon it itself in countries that are either communist or increasingly

secular. As an Orthodox thinker, Berkovits dismisses the need for any contact with Christianity:

As far as Jews are concerned, Judaism is fully sufficient. There is nothing in Christianity for them. Whatever in Christianity is acceptable to them is borrowed from Judaism.... And whatever is not Jewish in Christianity is not acceptable to the Jew.<sup>8</sup>

In his view, there are emotionally powerful reasons against dialogue: Christianity bears the guilt for engendering sufficient hatred of the Jews to enable the Holocaust to take place and then continue unimpeded. Equally, there is no corresponding positive theological motive for dialogue: Christianity is of no interest to Jews.

Berkovits' interpretation of Nazism is contextualised within his understanding of the confrontation between power history and faith history. Nazism, as the culmination of Western culture, builds upon the legacy of Christian anti-Jewish teaching. The Holocaust itself represented power history's attempt to destroy faith history once and for all. In exterminating the Jews, Nazism was hoping to eradicate the "spiritual dimension" of history:

there was a direct confrontation between Hitler's Germany and the people of Judaism because the Nazi ideology was essentially not a political one, but a nihilistic rebellion against all human values and a satanic defacing of the divine image of which man is the bearer on earth.<sup>9</sup>

Consistent with this interpretation, Berkovits places great emphasis on the persecution of devout Jews, and the desecration of Torah scrolls, synagogues, and Jewish cemeteries. He argues that in effectively wiping out Eastern European Jewry, the Nazis destroyed Judaism's "most important spiritual reservoir". The Holocaust was not so much a war against the Jews, but rather an attempt to destroy the "creative vitality of the Jewish people".<sup>10</sup> Armed resistance was thus less important than spiritual resistance. In continuing to pray and follow Jewish law, the "authentic" Jews of Eastern Europe were waging their

own war against the Nazi attempt to eradicate the "spiritual dimension" of history. The problems inherent in Berkovits' definition of Nazism will be discussed in sections 3. 5 and 3. 6.

Berkovits' interpretation of the covenant in terms of power history and faith history provides the framework for his theological response to the Holocaust. He differs from Rubenstein in emphasising the centrality of Israel's election. Rather than rejecting the concept of election as a consequence of the Holocaust, he argues that it was a primary cause. It was because the Nazis recognised the true nature of the Jews' election that they initiated the Holocaust. Whereas Rubenstein considers Israel's election and the Holocaust to be morally incompatible, Berkovits employs the same concept as the Holocaust's *raison d'être*. The parallel with Elchonon Wassermann is again striking. Both thinkers view assimilation as an doomed attempt to escape the responsibility of election; both because Western culture is unworthy of membership, and it is essentially hostile to Jews. Berkovits would doubtless agree with Wassermann that the Holocaust proves the futility of Jewish assimilation.

### 3. 3. GALUT: ISRAEL IN EXILE:

mankind has its own goals such as passion for power, desire for domination, for possessions and pleasures, such egoistic human drives deny the divine purpose in the creation of man. As a result God's own purpose finds itself in Exile in the history of mankind....It is this exile that is prior to, and at the root of the national exile. It is on account of this that the history of the Jewish people begins with exile.<sup>11</sup>

Galut or exile is central to Berkovits' understanding of the covenant, and is the means by which he anchors his interpretation of faith history and power history in the Jewish tradition. There are two dimensions to **Galut**: the cosmic exile of the divine presence in history and the historical exile of the Jews in the Diaspora; the latter is a reflection of the former. The establishment of the State of Israel is central to Berkovits' analysis: it ends

the historical exile of the Jewish people, and as such constitutes a significant stage in the messianic process.

In arguing that exile is a metaphysical characteristic of God, Berkovits is building upon the rabbinic concept of the **Shekhinah** and Luria's concept of **Tzimtzum**. In allowing human freedom, God creates the possibility for power history. In doing so, He ensures that His purposes remain unrealised: the Jews are a minority witnessing to the divine presence in the hostile environment of power history. Thus, the historical suffering and isolation of the Jews is a reflection of **Galut haShekhinah**, the exile of the divine presence. The historical exile of the Jews and the cosmic exile of the divine presence will only end with the coming of the Messiah.

Exile is therefore an integral characteristic of Jewish history. Indeed, Berkovits argues that Jewish history begins with a command to go into exile:

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.(Gen. 12: 1-2)

Exile is thus a prerequisite of Jewish history in the same way that divine self-limitation was a necessary precursor of creation. It is this sharing in the cosmic **Galut** that renders the Jews a Chosen People. In the command to Abraham, future promise is conditional on him accepting the burden of exile. It is the promise of **Ge'ulah--redemption--**that enables the Jews to endure exile. Thus, messianic hope centres on the expectation of an end to **Galut**, in the form of a return to the land of Israel.

In Berkovits' analysis, the Jews' historical exile begins with the call to Abraham; national exile begins with the **Hurban**, the end of sovereignty and the dispersion of the Jews. However, national exile should not be interpreted purely in negative terms: it called the Jews to a new level of covenantal responsibility, challenging them to typify faith history while living among "other

nations". Thus, he argues that the suffering of national exile has also been the source of Jewish survival.<sup>12</sup> The Holocaust, as the determined attempt of power history to eradicate faith history, threatened to overwhelm the spiritual resources of the latter. In Berkovits' analysis, the establishment of **Eretz Israel** was the only possible response to the Holocaust; it alone enabled the Jews to continue witnessing to the "spiritual dimension" of history. The Holocaust threatened to destroy **Galut** through extermination. The Return to **Eretz Israel** was an essential counter-testimony to annihilation:

The rise of the State of Israel, after two millennia of ... Exile and at the moment when it occurred, has become the reviving force, calling back to life the "dry bones" of the shattered **Galut**. Divine Providence had no choice but to grant us a measure of national redemption to meet the national **Hurban**.<sup>13</sup>

Whereas Rubenstein interprets the establishment of the State of Israel as a consequence of the Jews' rejection of providence, Berkovits views it as proof of the continuing validity of both divine providence and Israel's election. In one sense, Berkovits' approach is the more consistent: he allows both the Holocaust and the State of Israel to be read as "barometers" of God's disposition towards His people. If the Holocaust is to be interpreted as counter-testimony, it is only logical to argue that a positive event such as the State of Israel be accredited with the positive status of promise. Rubenstein is logically at fault in accepting the former, but refusing to countenance the possibility of the latter. The insistence on viewing the Holocaust within the continuum of Jewish history is one of the strengths of Berkovits' position.

However, surely the establishment of the State of Israel marks the end of the Jews' exile from power history: in establishing a nation state, defending it by military force, and attaining a nuclear capacity, the Israelis are relying upon the means of power history rather than faith? Berkovits disputes such a claim by arguing that Israel's continuing existence is only

explicable in terms of divine involvement in history. He interprets Israel's political isolation as a continuation of the state of *Galut*, despite the end of national exile:

As a state, Israel is in exile in power history just as Jews as a scattered people were in exile in the "wilderness of the nations". Israel's strength must come from the same resources from which the survival power of the Jew came in the past--from within the Jewish people, from within the Jew, from his heart and mind.<sup>14</sup>

Israel continues in exile, in that she can never become like other nations. In attempting to become a state like any other, Israel fails in her vocation. Berkovits suggests that the Yom Kippur war (1973) provided a salutary reminder of this fact: Israel can never be other than an exile among the nations.<sup>15</sup> He grudgingly acknowledges that Israel avails herself of the trappings of power history in order to ensure her survival, but argues that this is done in "the spirit and the methods of faith history".<sup>16</sup>

There are obvious difficulties with Berkovits' interpretation of the State of Israel. He freely admits that his analysis offers a "metaphysical interpretation of Jewish existence".<sup>17</sup> For substantiating evidence, he appeals to continued Jewish survival: survival after the Holocaust, followed by the establishment of the State of Israel, and victories in the Six Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War, provide illustrations of both God's providential care and Israel's status as witness to the divine presence in history. However, such claims belong to the realm of faith, being neither provable or falsifiable. Military setbacks, such as initial Egyptian successes in the Yom Kippur War are regarded as divine reminders, rather than counter-testimony. Despite his claims to the contrary, Berkovits is as reluctant as Rubenstein to admit evidence to stand counter to his thesis. Whereas Rubenstein reinterprets the establishment of Israel as proof of Israeli rejection of the covenant, rather than allowing it to stand as promise; Berkovits reinterprets all negative counter-testimony in terms of power history



and faith history: disaster is either equated with power history's attempt to destroy faith history, or is interpreted as a divine reprimand--reminding Israel of the futility of striving to assimilate and become like other nations.

Even if Berkovits' analysis of power history and faith history is deemed convincing, a question mark hangs over the credibility of his treatment of the State of Israel. Can Israeli policy be described in terms of faith history rather than power history? It is possible to present a cogent case for this argument with reference to the events of 1948, 1963, and 1973, but what of the invasion of Lebanon (1982) and the Intifada? The latter events are qualitatively different from previous campaigns: in 1948, 1967, and 1973, Israel was on the defensive, rather than being the aggressor. Michael Berenbaum suggests that Berkovits' analysis is "naive, distorted, and dangerous", in that it ignores the realities of Israel's political situation. Israel may be geographically isolated, in being surrounded by hostile Arab countries. However, it is ridiculous to talk of Israel being politically isolated in view of the substantial financial and military aid provided by the United States. As a nuclear force, Israel has undeniably entered the domain of power history, and it has done so as such a move "provides the only possible assurance for survival".<sup>18</sup> To view Israel solely in terms of faith history is both politically naive, and imposes an unreasonable burden of expectation upon the State. It is ironic that Rubenstein's analysis of current Israeli politics is ultimately more realistic than Berkovits', despite the questionable nature of his analysis of the rationale behind the establishment of the State.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. 4. HESTER PANIM: THE HIDING OF GOD'S FACE:

While God tolerates the sinner, he must abandon the victim; while he shows forbearance with the wicked, he must turn a deaf ear to the anguished cries of the violated. This is the ultimate tragedy of existence: God's very mercy and forbearance, his very love for man, necessitates the abandonment of some men to a fate they may well experience as

divine indifference to justice and human suffering.<sup>20</sup>

Berkovits echoes other Orthodox responses to the Holocaust in refusing to see the event as theologically unique. He challenges the validity of Rubenstein's claim that the Holocaust constitutes sufficient counter-testimony to end faith in the covenant. Whereas Rubenstein sees the challenge as a choice between belief in God as Lord of History (with the corollary that Hitler be viewed as the agent of divine punishment), and rejection of the covenant; Berkovits views the Holocaust as **one** illustration of the challenge posed to belief by innocent suffering. He therefore argues that quantity makes no difference:

the suffering of a single innocent child poses no less a problem to faith than the undeserved suffering of millions. As far as one's faith in a personal God is concerned, there is no difference between six, five, four million victims or one million.<sup>21</sup>

For Berkovits, there is no need to respond to the Holocaust as such: the question at issue is the broader one of theodicy, the justification of God's ways to humanity. In **Faith after the Holocaust**, he sets out to defend a conception of God that permits such suffering as the Holocaust, rather than responding to the event per se. The conception of God articulated by Berkovits synthesises a form of the free-will defence and the rabbinic image of **Hester Panim**, the Hiding of God's Face.

Berkovits' reliance on a form of the free-will defence is consistent with his reading of Jewish history as faith history, and his understanding of **Galut**. The idea of **Galut haShekhinah**, the Exile of the Divine Presence, is intrinsically linked with an emphasis upon free will. God withdraws in order to allow creation to occur. In Berkovits' reading, this withdrawal is not only necessary to provide space for creation to take place. In withdrawing the divine presence, or going into cosmic exile, God allows humanity the exercise of free will. Thus, he argues that free will is essential to creation:

freedom and responsibility are of the very essence of man. Without them man is not human. If there is to be man, he must be allowed to make his choices in freedom. If he has such freedom, he will use it. Using it, he will often use it wrongly.<sup>22</sup>

The confrontation between power history and faith history reflects, broadly speaking, the respective abuse and correct use of free will. In the Holocaust, Nazism qua power history abused free will in an attempt to exterminate the Jews qua faith history.

Berkovits acknowledges that the fate of the innocent in this scenario is unjustified suffering, but he argues that the existence of free will is necessary. He suggests that there is ultimately a choice between justice and human freedom:

he who demands justice of God must give up on man;  
he who asks for God's love and mercy beyond justice  
must accept suffering.<sup>23</sup>

Berkovits denies that, in adopting this position, he is justifying suffering. Within history, innocent suffering remains "unforgiveable".<sup>24</sup> However, although unforgiveable, suffering is to be accepted in faith. Ultimately, humanity cannot seek to comprehend the ways of providence, but can only respond in faith. He denies that this strategy illustrates "a willingness to forgive the unheard cries of millions".<sup>25</sup> The injustice is only temporary, in that there is "a dimension beyond history in which all suffering finds its redemption through God".<sup>26</sup> He also counters the charge that the God of the covenant is a God who constantly intervenes in history. The covenant necessitates divine withdrawal from history: the partnership between God and the Jews qua Chosen People relies upon the exercise of free will. Interventions in history, such as the Exodus, are miracles, rather than the norm. By this definition, a miracle is an event outside history; thus the Exodus does not set a precedent for future expectation that God will intervene in history. The Exodus cannot therefore be cited to support the contention that God should have intervened to stop the Holocaust.

Berkovits further develops his response to the Holocaust by appealing to the rabbinic concept of **Hester Panim**. In doing so, he further develops his reliance on the free will defence. The concept of **Hester Panim** combines with that of **Galut haShekhinah** to express the nature of the self-limitation of divine power. Berkovits interprets the biblical accounts as reflecting two understandings of God's presence in history. In the first reading, God intervenes in history to ensure that the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer. The second reading, recognises that this is too simplistic. Instead of history being interpreted in terms of rewards and punishments, the emphasis is either upon the unjust suffering of the innocent, or on the ultimate triumph of the weak over the strong (1 Sam. 2: 1-10). The problem facing the believer is the apparent divine lack of concern at the fate of the innocent; a problem considered at length in Job and Ecclesiastes. The concept of **Hester Panim** represents one attempt to respond to this problem.

Initially, the Hiding of God's Face was held to be a punishment for sin:

Then they will cry to the LORD, but he will not answer them; / he will hide his face from them at that time, / because they have made their deeds evil. (Micah 3: 4)

However, the Hiding of God's Face is also seen as inexplicable in the face of the suffering of the faithful:

How long, O LORD? Wilt thou / forget me for ever?  
How long wilt thou hide thy face / from me? How long  
must I bear pain in my / soul, / and have sorrow in  
my heart all the / day? / How long shall my enemy be  
exalted / over me? (Ps. 13:1-2)

Berkovits develops the latter response to argue that God is essentially a God who hides: divine hiddenness is the necessary consequence of **Galut haShekhinah**. The cosmic exile is necessary if humanity is to have free will. If human freedom is to be meaningful, then God must necessarily hide Himself. He finds traditional support for this argument in the rabbinic concept of the **Shekhinah**,

and in biblical references to hiddenness as a divine characteristic:

Truly, thou art a God who hidest / thyself, / O God of Israel, the Saviour. (Isa. 45: 15).

Thus, divine hiddenness is not a reaction to human action, but an essential attribute. Hiddenness is essential to God's role as Saviour. Berkovits argues that goodness is an essential quality of God, as is perfection. In being perfect and incapable of the unethical, God lacks the ability to strive after perfection. This value belongs solely to mankind. Divine hiddenness is essential to allow humanity the perfection that is necessary if the striving after perfection is to be meaningful. In hiding Himself, God thus enables humanity to seek salvation through striving after perfection in the form of covenantal obedience.

In the context of the Holocaust, the Hiding of God's Face both enables the Nazis to abuse free will in attempting to exterminate the Jews, and allows the "authentic" Jew the opportunity for **Kiddush haShem** in the most extreme circumstances. However, Berkovits acknowledges that the suffering in the Holocaust was so extreme that it cast doubt on the morality of God's continued hiddenness. The Holocaust differs from the story of Job, the biblical paradigm of faith in the face of divine hiddenness in one profound respect: there was no voice from the whirlwind:

unlike the case of Job, God remained silent to the very end of the tragedy and the millions in the concentration camps were left alone to shift for themselves in the midst of infinite despair....To the very end God remained silent and in hiding. Millions were looking for him--in vain.<sup>27</sup>

Berkovits suggests that if it had not been for the restatement of promise inherent in the establishment of **Eretz Israel**, then the counter-testimony of the Holocaust would have been sufficient to end faith in the covenant:

The state of Israel came at a moment in history when nothing else could have saved Israel from extinction through hopelessness.<sup>28</sup>

Berkovits dismisses the suggestion that the Holocaust was a punishment for sin, arguing that such suffering was "injustice absolute". He also acknowledges that it was "injustice countenanced by God".<sup>29</sup> However, does Berkovits' reliance upon a form of the free-will defence, in conjunction with his concept of *Hester Panim*, constitute an acceptable response to the Holocaust? There are a number of levels that a critique of this theodicy can take. The first concerns the adequacy of an appeal to free will as a response to innocent suffering in general, and to the Holocaust in particular. The main question concerns the morality of such an appeal. Does the assertion of divine hiddenness resolve the problem of innocent suffering, or create additional difficulties:

Given the moral attributes, the qualities of love and concern, that are integral to God's nature, how can we rest in the assertion of his self-willed absence, that is, in passivity, in the face of the murder of one million children?<sup>30</sup>

Berkovits asserts that the existence of free will necessarily entails the risk of abuse, but that the benefits are such as to merit such a risk. He acknowledges that such a strategy sacrifices the victim in the interest of preserving the free will of the aggressor. The resulting suffering is inevitable, even though it can never be justified except in "a dimension beyond history". Are such claims justified? Steven Katz suggests not. First, can such extensive suffering as that inherent in the Holocaust be justified as the necessary price of free will? Could not God have created a world in which there was free will, but less evil? Furthermore, even if Berkovits' argument is logically coherent, even convincing, is it morally acceptable? In Berkovits' analysis, there is a tendency to forget the individual victims. He offers a logical explanation for the existence of innocent suffering, rather than an emotionally or morally satisfying response to the Holocaust.

The general nature of Berkovits' theodicy is reflected in his attitude to numerical scale. He argues that numbers make no difference: the challenge to faith in

a personal God is the same whether the sufferer is one innocent child or the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. However, is this the case? The problem is doubtless the same as far as the philosophical justification of God is concerned. Within the context of covenantal faith, it is not. Berkovits freely admits that in exterminating Eastern European Jewry, the Nazis wiped out the spiritual centre of World Jewry. This extermination occurred against the background of God's covenantal promise to protect His Chosen People. The challenge to covenant faith comes precisely from the number of victims and the manner in which they died:

From the perspective of covenant theology, quantity is decisive....If God is specially involved in the destiny of the Jews, there is no escape from the fact that the annihilation of almost half the world Jewish population represents a greater problem than the suffering of a small number.<sup>31</sup>

Berkovits himself admits that numbers are decisive when he argues that only the establishment of the State of Israel could counterbalance the hopelessness engendered by the Holocaust.

The major difficulty with Berkovits' theodicy is its "cost-effectiveness": the numerical price is too high. Such a theodicy may be convincing to those who share Berkovits' orthodoxy. To the non-Orthodox, such a theodicy "mocks the victims far more than it honours them".<sup>32</sup> There is also the crucial issue of whether it is legitimate to offer an interpretation of a victim's suffering that it is incompatible with that individual's own beliefs. Berkovits' theodicy is possibly legitimate if applied solely to those among the Orthodox he deems to be "authentic" Jews, but what of those with different, or no beliefs? The question arises as to whether it is legitimate to distinguish between "authentic" and "inauthentic" Jews when all the victims died because they were deemed racially Jewish by the Nazis.

### 3. 5. WITH GOD IN HELL:

I who was not there, cannot reject, because to reject would be a desecration of the myriads who accepted their lot in faith. How dare I reject, if

they accepted! Neither can I accept. I who was not there, because I was not there, dare not accept, dare not submit, because my brothers in their tens of thousands, who did go through that hell, did rebel, and did reject. How dare I, who was not there, accept that superhuman suffering and submit to it in faith!<sup>33</sup>

The irony is that Berkovits' reliance on the free-will defence and the concept of **Hester Panim** calls for precisely this kind of acceptance and submission. In **With God in Hell** Berkovits offers an "electrifying and soul-stirring collection of tales of faith in extremis"<sup>34</sup>; tales which serve to illustrate his definition of "authentic" Jewishness. It is this demarcation between "authentic" and "inauthentic" faith that undermines his claim to suspend judgement.

Berkovits is adamant that the Holocaust marked the confrontation of power history (in the form of a morally corrupt Western European culture) and faith history. The Jews' ability to meet this challenge was undermined by the degree of "inauthentic" Jewishness, in the form of assimilation. He regards Western European Jewry as particularly corrupt because of the high level of assimilation. The "authentic" Jew was thus isolated in his attempt to combat the "religious befouling of purity and innocence" that was the primary aim of Nazism.<sup>35</sup> In persisting in bearing witness to their faith, the "authentic" Jews engaged in battle with Nazism:

it was in the ghettos and concentration camps that the dignity of man reached its highest manifestation, commensurate in its greatness to the abysmal depths of the moral bankruptcy of Western civilization.<sup>36</sup>

Berkovits thus argues that the most effective resistance to Nazism was that of the Hasidim and pious Jews of Eastern Europe. In persisting in observing Torah even in the ghettos and deathcamps, they bore witness to values that were the very antithesis of Nazism. He argues that the high fatalities among the Hasidim and the Orthodox reflect their conviction that survival was not the main priority.



The central point at issue in Berkovits' analysis of "authentic" Jewishness is a halachic one. The primary commandment concerns the sanctification and preservation of life. A recurrent question in the rabbinic Responsa of the Nazi period is whether it is legitimate to break the commandments of Torah in order to preserve life. Rulings differed as to whether the circumstances called for **Kiddush haShem** or **Kiddush ha-hayyim**, the Sanctification of life. Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum, one of the leaders of Warsaw Jewry, argued that the situation called for the latter:

This is a time for **Kiddush ha-hayyim**, the sanctification of life, and not for **Kiddush ha-Shem**, the holiness of martyrdom. Previously the Jew's enemy sought his soul and the Jew sanctified his body in martyrdom (i.e., he made a point of preserving what the enemy wished to take from him); now the oppressor demands the Jew's body and the Jew is obliged therefore to defend it, to preserve his life.<sup>37</sup>

In recognising the discontinuity between past Christian anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, Nissenbaum calls for a discontinuity in response, hence his support for armed resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto. Berkovits disagrees and asserts that **Kiddush haShem** remained the most appropriate response. However, he acknowledges the element of discontinuity in the situation by redefining the concept:

sanctification of life means living in the presence of God, striving for the integrated harmonization of the spirit and flesh as the wholeness of human life and giving this striving potent expression<sup>38</sup> in responsible human behavior towards all creation.

In effect, **Kiddush haShem** becomes identical with covenantal faithfulness. Berkovits identifies such faithfulness with Jewish practice, thus enabling him to rule:

Judaism is the life of the Jew and its sanctification. Not to surrender it is the highest affirmation of life itself.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, contra Nissenbaum, Berkovits rules that in maintaining high visibility through continued Jewish religious practice, the "authentic" Jew was sanctifying life, even though such visibility increased the likelihood of his death. In sanctifying life in this way, the

"authentic" Jew attained the highest form of **Kiddush haShem**: the Holocaust was marked by God's apparent abandonment of His people, in that He remained hidden; in sanctifying life, the "authentic" Jew accepted this "radical abandonment" as a "gift from God".<sup>40</sup>

Berkovits assessment of "authentic" Jewishness has provoked considerable uneasiness among Jewish critics. Steven Katz suggests there is an inherent danger in interpreting the Holocaust as a confrontation between good and evil, qua faith history and power history:

The greater the malevolence the greater the heroism. The significance of Berkovits' constant invocation of instance of truly extraordinary moral heroism in the face of Nazi brutality turns on this contention....Thus if killing six million Jews caused a corresponding amount and kind of virtue, killing twelve million will produce, say, twice the amount of virtue and a still higher quality of moral nobility.<sup>41</sup>

Katz is not seriously suggesting that Berkovits would legitimate a hypothetically greater Holocaust on the grounds that it would generate more "authentic" Jewishness. He is highlighting the fallacy in Berkovits' selective use of evidence. First, all of the Six Million do not fall within his definition of "authentic" Jewishness. Is Berkovits suggesting that there is a qualitative distinction between the death of an "authentic" Jew, and that of a convert (such as Edith Stein) or a non-believing Jew? Second, what is the basis for his analysis of the motivation of the "authentic" Jew? Alan Berger questions the conclusions that Berkovits draws from the tales in **With God in Hell**. Do such tales explain

why the pious Jew who prayed in a corner of an enormous killing pit, surrounded by corpses, was performing a holy act. Was this faith? Was it moral indifference? Or was the man in a state of shock?<sup>42</sup>

The whole question of the faith or otherwise of the victims is one that needs to be approached with great humility and caution. Regarding such faith as data is an inherently dangerous and questionable exercise.<sup>43</sup>

There is also the crucial question of selectivity. Berkovits concentrates solely on the piety of the Hasidim and the Orthodox Jews of Eastern Europe. Both Langer and Berenbaum suggest that such a strategy deflects attention from the barbarity of the Holocaust:

Berkovits seems determined to document only the moments of glory when individuals achieved the highest in ethical and compassionate behavior. He therefore runs the risk of transforming the concentration camp experience into a heroic one rather than one of deeply tragic proportions.<sup>44</sup>

In defining such behaviour as "authentic" Jewishness, Berkovits implicitly passes judgement on those who either rejected belief or failed to act in this way. Ultimately, his description of faith in the ghettos and deathcamps fails to meet his own criteria: he accepts the "superhuman suffering" of others and submits to it in faith.

### 3.6. THE UNIQUENESS OF THE HOLOCAUST:

Throughout Berkovits' work, there is ambivalence over the precise status of the Holocaust. On the one hand, he denies that the Holocaust is theologically or historically unique; on the other, he asserts that the event would have marked the end of covenantal faith had it not been for the establishment of the State of Israel. This ambivalence is a major flaw in Berkovits' approach.

Theologically, Berkovits argues that the Holocaust poses no radically new problem: it restates the traditional question of theodicy. He is less consistent in denying that the Holocaust was historically unique. Berkovits points out that the Jews have always been beset by Amalek throughout their history:

Within the comprehensive context of the Jewish experience, the concentration camps and gas chambers were one among a long series of Holocaust experiences.<sup>45</sup>

The Holocaust thus poses the same theological problem as previous disasters. It is no different in this respect from the destruction of the First and Second Temples, and previous instances of the expulsion and destruction of Jewish communities. The only difference lies in the scale

of the disaster, and numerical scale is irrelevant to a theological response to the problem of innocent suffering.

Yet, elsewhere in his work, Berkovits offers a conflicting analysis of the Holocaust, suggesting that the event was indeed historically unique, being qualitatively different from previous disasters. He offers a number of reasons as to why this is the case. First, the Nazis conceived the idea of the **total** destruction of World Jewry:

With the Hitler era, something entirely new entered Jewish and world history. Whereas during the specifically Christian era of Jewish persecution the genocidal criminality was normally limited to localized communities, from the beginning of Western civilization's Nazi phase the threat to Jewish survival becomes total.<sup>46</sup>

The difference is a conceptual one, rather than one of numerical scale. In conceiving the Holocaust, the Nazis added a new dimension to Jewish history: the threat of total extinction. The establishment of the State of Israel was a response to this threat. After the Holocaust, Jews could no longer delude themselves that Western culture would act to prevent total annihilation. The Nazi threat to Jewish survival marked the end of **Galut**, and thus marks the beginning of a new era in Jewish history. However, if the Holocaust was a "radically new event--the total threat"<sup>47</sup>, then surely it is also theologically unique. Berkovits describes the return to **Eretz Israel** as a messianic event. If this is so, then it would be more consistent to grant the event that made this return necessary unique theological status. The Holocaust is on a different theological plane to previous disasters: it engendered a hopelessness that necessitated the longed for return to **Eretz Israel**.

Second, the Holocaust was of a different nature to previous anti-Jewish persecution. The difference was not confined to the local nature, or numerical scale of the disaster. Berkovits acknowledges that the dehumanization of the Holocaust was also unique:

The cruelty of the Germans was different not only in degree from the other forms of cruelty practised by

man against his fellows. Unique was their system of the planned dehumanization of their victims....It has rightly been said that what people had to face in the liquidation of the ghettos and on entering a concentration camp was immeasurable with all human experience and it defies all moral criteria.<sup>48</sup>

However, in concentrating solely on the reaction of "authentic" Jews, Berkovits fails to acknowledge the negative theological repercussions of this situation. If humanity is made in the image of God (Gen. 1: 26), then the "planned dehumanization" of the victims can be seen as the de-creation of humanity as God's image. The fact that some maintained their faith in *extremis* does not detract from the fact that the Nazis succeeded in dehumanising many of their victims. The success of this systematic dehumanization challenges fundamental beliefs in the existence of innate human dignity, the progress of civilization, and the nature of moral behaviour.<sup>48</sup> In being so selective in his choice of illustrations, Berkovits ignores the theological challenge of those victims who lost their faith, or succumbed to the dehumanization of their situation. Indeed, he fails to address the question of what "authentic" Jewishness is in such a situation. The debate between religious and secular Jews suggests that this is one of the dominant, and as yet unresolved, issues of the post-Holocaust era.

Berkovits' ambivalence over the uniqueness of the Holocaust adds to the unease generated by his use of evidence. It becomes increasingly apparent that his strategy is to justify his theological conclusions by reference to historical data, rather than allowing conclusions to arise from a study of available data. He thus imposes a theological interpretation upon the Holocaust. A strategy that, in part, explains his avoidance of contradictory data. He merely appeals to the historical data that serves to substantiate his conclusions. Thus, he draws upon the accounts of Hasidic and Orthodox Jews, but ignores the more critical accounts of secular Jews, such as Primo Levi. He also ignores contradictory Orthodox sources, such as Nissenbaum's

rejection of Kiddush haShem. Steven Katz concludes that the misuse of historical evidence remains the crucial weakness in Berkovits' approach:

the proper procedure is to investigate the historical structure of the Sho'ah and then to ask, as a second step, what the theological consequences, if any, flow from one's judgement regarding the historical events. Berkovits, however, does not follow this course. He fails to do the former because he knows in advance what he wants to protect vis à vis the latter. But this avoidance of the root issue leaves his conclusions, even when they are correct, open to criticism, for it appears that they are cheaply won, predicated on a failure to face what happened to the Jewish people this century.<sup>49</sup>

The irony is that, in terms of his attitude to the State of Israel, Berkovits is acutely aware of "what happened to the Jewish people this century". His failure lies in a reluctance to confront the theological implications of the unique elements of the Holocaust.

#### CONCLUSION:

Berkovits' aim in *Faith After the Holocaust* is to articulate a traditional Jewish theodicy, in response to the radical suggestions of Richard Rubenstein. However, in spite of his intentions to the contrary, he only succeeds in illustrating the inadequacy of the tradition--as it stands--as the basis for a response to the Holocaust. Despite his assertion that the Holocaust poses no new theological challenge, Berkovits is consistently drawn into reinterpreting the tradition. First, he reinterprets the covenant in terms of power history and faith history. The latter concept requires a reinterpretation of the rabbinic and Lurianic understanding of divine exile. Second, Berkovits offers a definition of "authentic" Jewishness. In doing so, he follows Elchonon Wassermann's distinction between pious Jews engaged in Torah study and assimilated Jews who had abandoned Torah. However, he differs from Wassermann in rejecting the traditional theodicy of "for our sins we are punished". The distinction between "authentic" and "inauthentic" Jews is meaningful within Wassermann's work: the latter bring the Holocaust upon the Jewish people as punishment for

straying from Torah; the piety of the former serves to counteract or redeem the sin that incurred such punishment. However, can such a distinction be said to be meaningful without the support of traditional theodicy. If the Holocaust was not a punishment for sin, then what does it mean to talk of "inauthentic" Jews?

Although Berkovits rejects the suggestion that the Holocaust was a punishment for sin in favour of an appeal to free will and **Hester Panim**, his distinction between "authentic" and "inauthentic" Jews implicitly passes judgement upon the latter. However, if the Holocaust was the result of the abuse of free will, then all the Six Million were passive victims: the Nazis were the active agents. If the victims suffered as a result of the actions of others, then the legitimacy of drawing distinctions between them is open to question. In praising the spirituality of the "authentic" Jew, Berkovits implicitly criticises that of the other victims. In limiting the scope of his definition of "authentic" Jewishness, Berkovits limits the scope of his response: he does not address the situation of those, either during or after the Holocaust, who could not accept such propositions. Hence Berenbaum's fear that the Holocaust will be transformed into a heroic experience. The problem facing religious belief is generated by the fate of those who died unable to understand, or accept their fate in faith a problem that Berkovits totally fails to address. The weakness of Berkovits' response is thus the total opposite to that of Richard Rubenstein. In offering a stark alternative between acceptance of the Holocaust as punishment for sin and rejection of the covenant, Rubenstein ignores the rich tradition of covenantal reinterpretation in the face of counter-testimony. This response is generated by genuine moral outrage at the suggestion that the suffering of the Six Million be interpreted as punishment. In emphasising the resources of the tradition for responding to historical counter-testimony, Berkovits tends to lose sight of such moral outrage at the human fate of the victims. In his analysis, the Holocaust tends to be

subsumed into general, impersonal concepts of "suffering" or "counter-testimony", rather than specifically referring to the historical fate of six million Jews at the hands of the Nazis. In his concern to reflect the concerns and dissatisfaction of the non-Orthodox with the traditional theodicy of "for our sins we are punished", Rubenstein fails to acknowledge the existence of alternative interpretations of the covenant. By contrast, in his concern to defend the tradition, Berkovits fails to address the genuine concern and questions of the non-Orthodox over the morality of such traditional responses. In relying on an appeal to free will and **Hester Panim**, Berkovits fails to dispel, or even respond to such moral qualms. Is such an appeal any more morally or emotionally acceptable than an assertion that the Holocaust was a punishment for sin? The assertion of God's self-willed hiddenness in the face of such suffering raises as many problems as it solves.



FOOTNOTES:

1. Eliezer Berkovits, **Faith After the Holocaust**, New York: KTAV, 1973, 3.
2. Ibid. 89.
3. Ibid. 119.
4. Eliezer Berkovits, **With God in Hell**, 83.
5. Berkovits, **Faith After the Holocaust**, 16.
6. Ibid. 18.
7. Ibid. 44.
8. Ibid. 44-5.
9. Berkovits, **With God in Hell**, 81.
10. Eliezer Berkovits, **Crisis and Faith**, New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1976, ix.
11. Ibid. 155.
12. Ibid. 156.
13. Ibid. 159.
14. Berkovits, **Faith After the Holocaust**, 164.
15. Berkovits, **Crisis and Faith**, 161.
16. Berkovits, **Faith After the Holocaust**, 164.
17. Berkovits, **Crisis and Faith**, 160.
18. Michael Berenbaum, **The Vision of the Void**, 175.
19. See Richard L. Rubenstein, 'Covenant and Holocaust', 670-1.
20. Berkovits, **Faith After the Holocaust**, 106.
21. Ibid. 128.
22. Ibid. 105.
23. Ibid. 106.
24. Ibid. 136.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid. 69. For a very different reading of the story of Job, see Elie Wiesel, **Messengers of God**, 211-35.
28. Berkovits, **Faith After the Holocaust**, 134.
29. Ibid. 89.
30. Steven Katz, **Post-Holocaust Dialogues**, 426.
31. Richard L. Rubenstein, 'Auschwitz and Covenant Theology', 717.
32. John K. Roth, 'A Theodicy of Protest', in Steven Davis ed., **Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy**, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985, 7-22, 30-7, 13.
33. Berkovits, **Faith After the Holocaust**, 4.

34. Alan L. Berger, 'Holocaust and History', 204.
35. Berkovits, **With God in Hell**, 92.
36. Ibid. 25.
37. Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum, in Saul Esh, 'The Dignity of the Destroyed: Toward a Definition of the Period of the Holocaust', **Judaism**, 1962, 1962, 11:1, 99-111, 105.
38. Berkovits, **With God in Hell**, 105.
39. Ibid. 108.
40. Berkovits, **Faith After the Holocaust**, 81.
41. Katz, **Post-Holocaust Dialogues**, 276-7.
42. Berger, 'Holocaust and History', 204-5.
43. See George Steiner, 'Postscript', in **Language and Silence: Essays 1958-66**, London: Faber & Faber, 1985, 180-193, 188-90, 92-3. For a discussion of the desire to identify survival with positive spiritual values, see Lawrence Langer's analysis of the work of Viktor Frankl and Bruno Bettelheim, in Langer, **Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit**, Albany: New York State University Press, 1982, 15-65.
44. Berenbaum, **The Vision of the Void**, 178-9.
45. Eliezer Berkovits, 'Understanding the Present to Save the Future', **Remembering for the Future**, Supplementary Volume, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988, 32-8, 34-5.
46. Berkovits, **Crisis and Faith**, 148-9.
47. Ibid. 158.
48. <sup>BERKOVITS, FAITH AFTER THE HOLOCAUST 78-9.</sup> See Lawrence Langer, 'The Death of Choice', in **Versions of Survival**, 67-129.
49. Katz, **Post-Holocaust Dialogues**, 270.

4. EMIL FACKENHEIM: TO MEND THE WORLD?

4. 1. INTRODUCTION.

4. 2. UNIQUENESS AND THE HOLOCAUST.

4. 3. COVENANT AND HISTORY.

4. 4. THE 614th COMMANDMENT.

4. 5. TIKKUN OLAM: TO MEND THE WORLD.

4. 1. INTRODUCTION.

Of those Jewish thinkers concerned with articulating a religious response to the Holocaust, Emil Fackenheim is undoubtedly the most prolific. His importance lies, in part, in his success in giving voice to the concerns of the North American Jewish community.<sup>1</sup> Fackenheim himself divides the development of his thought into three stages. The first, 1948-1957, was

characterized by an existentialist stance that accentuated the contradictions in humankind, history, and the moral life and an insistence on the need for a leap of faith in God in order for the individual to arrive at a sense of life's ultimate significance.<sup>2</sup>

Fackenheim was primarily engaged in dialogue with the thought of Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Leo Strauss, Søren Kierkegaard, and Hegel. His aim was to analyse the post-Kantian internalisation of religious belief, and the subsequent "recovery" of the "otherness" of God by Kierkegaard. This project was aborted in order to embark on an analysis of Hegel's philosophy of religion.<sup>3</sup> The second stage of development in Fackenheim's thought, 1957-1967, was marked by the rejection of the implicit universalism of the first stage. This stage emphasised the need to identify with, and speak from within, one's particular faith community. Emphasis is laid upon the "singled-out" condition of the Jews, and the meaning of their election.

Fackenheim's work on the Holocaust is confined, almost exclusively, to the third stage in the development of his thought. He locates the turning point as his participation in a symposium on 'Jewish Values in the

Post-Holocaust Future' (Easter 1967). Fackenheim asserts that this was the first time he had felt "morally compelled" to address the "Holocaust-in-particular", rather than the Holocaust as an example of "evil-in-general".<sup>4</sup> This symposium, followed by the Six Day War, brought the "Holocaust-in-particular" to the forefront of his work; a place that it has continued to occupy. There are two stages in Fackenheim's understanding of the Holocaust: the first is expressed in **God's Presence in History** (1970); the second in **To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought** (1982). The second book attempts to rectify the self-perceived weaknesses in the first.

The transition from viewing the Holocaust as an example of "evil-in-general" to an emphasis upon the "Holocaust-in-particular" is integral to Fackenheim's work. Belief in the uniqueness of the Holocaust is foundational to his response. The need to reinterpret the covenant arises only after the event's uniqueness has been acknowledged. The importance attached to the assertion of the Holocaust's uniqueness is reflected in Fackenheim's repeated attempts to define and defend this claim. The assertion of uniqueness, in turn, informs his understanding of covenantal faith. In Fackenheim's analysis, covenantal promise derives from "root experiences"; whereas, historical counter-testimony reflects a series of "epoch-making" events. The Holocaust is the supreme epoch-making event. Thus, Fackenheim's interpretation of the Holocaust rests upon the assumption that history can effect covenantal faith. This assumption marks a second transition in Fackenheim's thought. In 1964, he asserted that:

Religious faith ... is empirically verifiable; but nothing empirical can possibly refute it.<sup>5</sup>

His post-1967 emphasis upon the "Holocaust-in-particular" is marked by the rejection of this claim:

Doubtless the greatest doctrinal change in my whole career came with the view that at least **Jewish** faith

is, after all, not absolutely immune to all empirical events.<sup>6</sup>

Belief in the uniqueness of the Holocaust thus underpins Fackenheim's reading of Jewish history in terms of root experiences and epoch-making events.

There is also a noticeable development in Fackenheim's understanding of the Holocaust within the context of covenantal faith. In 1967, he articulated his response to the Holocaust in terms of a "614th commandment". The Holocaust bore witness to the Commanding, but not to the Saving Presence of God. The essence of the 614th commandment was a prohibition against giving Hitler posthumous victories. Fackenheim's name is most closely associated with this formulation. However, he has since modified this position in response to criticism and the development in his own thought. Fackenheim acknowledges that the existence of a Commanding Voice in the Holocaust is an insufficient basis for belief, unless accompanied by a Saving Presence, however fragmentary. Thus, in *To Mend the World*, he argues that the Holocaust also bears witness to a fragmentary Saving Presence; a Presence that forms the basis of subsequent belief. This Saving Presence is equated with the acts of resistance, both physical and spiritual, that occurred during the Holocaust. Such acts bear witness to the Saving Presence of God, and provide the basis for *Tikkun Olam*, the Mending of the World.

Fackenheim's work on the Holocaust therefore only belongs to one stage, albeit the longest, of his career. His thought on the subject is continuously developing. The transition is most conspicuous when *God's Presence in History* is contrasted with *To Mend the World*.

#### 4. 2. UNIQUENESS AND THE HOLOCAUST:

Only if the Holocaust is "unique" in some specifiable and demonstrable way are the new and unusual theological departures advocated by Fackenheim required or justified. Hence a major task is set for Fackenheim by his own presuppositions.<sup>7</sup>

Having made the transition from viewing the Holocaust as an example of "evil-in-general" to studying the theological repercussions of the "Holocaust-in-particular", Fackenheim now regards universalism (in the sense of his former position) as a threat to be overcome. Acceptance of the event's uniqueness is the essential prerequisite of any response to the Holocaust, or any analysis of the State of Israel or contemporary Judaism. Thus, he goes to great lengths, both to attack interpretations that subsume the Holocaust under extant categories, and to defend uniqueness against charges of parochialism or separatism. In addition, he aims to provide a detailed definition of precisely why the Holocaust is unique.

Fackenheim is adamant that the Holocaust cannot be subsumed under existing categories, either religious or philosophical. Neither the Ninth of Av nor Good Friday are adequate to the task of representing the counter-testimony of the Holocaust. He is equally critical of attempts to regard the Holocaust as an example of "evil / suffering-in-general". Fackenheim also rejects attempts to regard the event as one among many examples of twentieth century inhumanity, alongside Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Vietnam, Biafra, and Cambodia. In doing so, he has been accused of both parochialism and separatism.<sup>8</sup> In consequence, Fackenheim's defence of uniqueness takes the form of an, at times unconscious, dialogue with his critics. As a result, he has become increasingly self-conscious concerning his terminology, asserting that "uniqueness" and "universality" are inadequate terms for his purpose. He notes that, if the event is understood solely in terms of uniqueness, "this cuts it off from preceding and succeeding history". However, to understand the event as universal:

makes it merely another example of some such species  
as 'persecution', 'racism', 'antisemitism' or  
'genocide'.<sup>9</sup>

Fackenheim therefore suggests a compromise. Uniqueness is redefined as the "transmutation"--in qualitative terms--of

a feature that has been persistent throughout history, and is thus in some sense universal. The Holocaust therefore bears witness to the "transmutation" of elements present throughout history, such as anti-Semitism and mass-murder. However, this re-definition fails to solve the problem: Hiroshima could be described as the "transmutation" of war through the introduction of the atomic bomb. Thus, Fackenheim is still left with the problem of why the Holocaust is unique.

His response is to delineate, with variations, five major elements of uniqueness.<sup>10</sup> In doing so, he offers a historical and ideological, rather than a theological, analysis of the Holocaust. The first element of uniqueness concerns the "radical absurdity" of the Holocaust.<sup>11</sup> As an illustration of this, Fackenheim frequently cites the priority given to sending Jews to the gas chambers, rather than making trains available to the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front. He argues that this is proof of the "radical absurdity" of the Holocaust: more importance was attached to killing Jews than to winning the war.

The second element in Fackenheim's definition of uniqueness is intrinsically linked to his emphasis on the "radical absurdity" of the Holocaust. The Holocaust was an end in itself, and as such was more important than the war effort:

The "Final Solution" was not a pragmatic project serving such ends as political power or economic greed. Nor was it the negative side of a positive religious or political fanaticism. It was an end in itself.<sup>12</sup>

The Holocaust differed from the events of 70 or 135, in that it did not arise from a conflict of interests. Fackenheim appeals to Jewish powerlessness to support his thesis, arguing that the Jews were only a threat "in the Nazi mind". The belief that the Holocaust did not arise from a conflict of interests, combined with Jewish powerlessness, gives rise to the assertion that the Holocaust did not constitute a war.<sup>13</sup> However, such an argument does not bear close scrutiny. The Holocaust was a

war, but one of annihilation rather than conquest.<sup>14</sup> Second, the Holocaust did serve both pragmatic and economic interests. Fackenheim is emphatic that the Holocaust hindered rather than aided the Nazi war aims, appealing to the diversion of trains from the Eastern Front to support his argument. However, against this, the Holocaust provided the Reich with an endless supply of slave labour, while the confiscation of Jewish assets was an economic benefit. Further, the Holocaust required the close cooperation of various sectors of the Reich (the civil service, the transport networks, industry, the medical professions); cooperation that benefited the war effort. The question of the economic and pragmatic advantages of the Holocaust is not as straightforward as Fackenheim suggests. The disadvantages (the diversion of trains, the loss of skilled workmen) have to be weighed against the advantages. Second, to dismiss the Jews as a threat only "in the Nazi mind" underestimates the power of the Nazi *Weltanschauung*; a fact that Fackenheim later acknowledges.<sup>15</sup>

The third element held to constitute uniqueness concerns the radicality of evil:

In the Holocaust a nadir was reached that was hitherto inconceivable.<sup>16</sup>

With the Holocaust, "a previously inconceivable dimension of evil" became "conceivable".<sup>17</sup> In effect, Fackenheim is offering a variation on Rubenstein's argument that having occurred, the Holocaust sets a precedent. Fackenheim develops his argument in a second direction that also unconsciously echoes Rubenstein. He argues that the evil of Holocaust is encapsulated in the figure of the **Muselmann**, the archetypal dehumanized victim of the deathcamps:

The most characteristic source of the Holocaust world--other than the screams and gasps of the children and their mothers--is another new man: the **Muselmann** who is already dead while still alive.<sup>18</sup>

The figure of the **Muselmann** shows that the "good in man" can be destroyed through exposure to systematic



inhumanity. The Holocaust therefore undermines belief in innate human goodness; a fact particularly relevant to Judaism and Christianity because of their shared conviction that humanity is created in the image of God. The figure of the **Muselmann** further illustrates Rubenstein's assertion that human rights are dependent on consensus, rather than being absolute or innate.

The fourth aspect in Fackenheim's case for the uniqueness of the Holocaust concerns the Nuremberg Laws. The Holocaust was unique because the Jews were condemned to death on the basis of their race. In this respect, Fackenheim cites the Austrian philosopher, Jean Améry, to the effect that after the promulgation of the Nuremberg Laws, the Jews were "corpses on vacation".<sup>19</sup> Against arguments that the Slavs and Poles were also deemed racially subhuman, Fackenheim argues that there were two categories of criminals in the Third Reich. The first included those whose crime was "doing"; a category that included political opponents, common criminals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals. The second category included those whose "crime" was "being". This group has two subdivisions. The first of these includes the Slavs and the Poles, and covers those whose "crime" was that their numbers were too great. As a result, the Slavs and Poles were decimated in order to create **Lebensraum**--living space--for Germans. The second sub-section includes those whose "crime" was existence per se:

With the possible exception of the Gypsies, in the case of Jews alone existence itself was a crime unpardonable, and punishable by degradation, torture and death.<sup>20</sup>

Jews were thus condemned to die on the basis of their race, rather than their faith, a fact that leads directly into Fackenheim's final element of uniqueness: the Holocaust deprived the Jews of the possibility of martyrdom--"Can there be martyrdom when there is no choice?". All that is left to the Jews is a "faithfulness resembling" martyrdom.<sup>21</sup> Fackenheim again unconsciously echoes Rubenstein, in arguing that the Holocaust differed

from previous persecutions in eradicating the possibility of conversion.

Thus, the Jews' fate differs from that of the Gypsies when set within a religious framework. There are two aspects to this framework, both reflections of covenantal faith. First, it is belief in the Jews' status as Chosen People that leads to the assertion that the Holocaust was unique:

The fate of Israel is of central concern because Israel is the elect people of God through whom God's redemptive work is done in the world....He who strikes Israel, therefore, engages himself in battle with God and it is for this reason that the history of Israel is the fulcrum of world history.<sup>22</sup>

Fackenheim implicitly recognises this when he argues that the radical absurdity of the Holocaust is most evident when the event is set within the covenantal framework:

not a single one of the six million died because they had failed to keep the divine-Jewish covenant: they all died because their grandparents had kept it, if only to the minimum extent of raising Jewish children. Here is the point where we reach radical religious absurdity.<sup>23</sup>

The Holocaust is religiously unique because it bears witness to the inversion of the covenant: the Jews were promised life in return for covenantal faithfulness; yet, in the Holocaust, they died because of the "faithfulness" of their grandparents. The Holocaust bore witness to another covenant, in which the Jews were again the Chosen People, but were elected (or rather selected) for death. Horowitz dismisses such language on the grounds that it contains "a dangerous element of mystification"<sup>24</sup>, but it is arguable that this "mystification" was already present. There is the suggestion that the Nazis deliberately subverted the idea of divine chosenness, as illustrated by the timetabling of selections for the gas chambers on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; or the start of the final offensive against the Warsaw Ghetto on the first day of Passover. The fact that the Jews were condemned to die on the basis of "race" differs from the similar fate of the

Gypsies precisely because of the former's unique status as the Chosen People.

The repercussions of the Nazi assault on humanity, as illustrated by the figure of the **Muselmann**, gain their power from being set within a religious framework. The figure of the **Muselmann** inverts the biblical idea of humanity being created in the image of God. The Holocaust's uniqueness lies, in part, in the systematic **de-creation** of humanity as the divine image. The Nazis, in their role as 'God', set apart the Jews for dehumanization or de-creation, thus reversing the humanizing process of Scripture. The covenant was given to enable the Jews qua Chosen People to fulfil their role as stewards of creation. In the deathcamps, the Nazis succeeded in dehumanizing Jews qua **Muselmänner**, to the extent that they became the sub-humans of Nazi propaganda. It is the inversion of biblical ethics that poses a unique challenge to both Jewish and Christian belief.

To conclude, the irony lies in the fact that, having argued so strongly for the historical uniqueness of the Holocaust, Fackenheim fails to draw the logical conclusions from this. His theological analysis of the Holocaust is beset by a constant ambivalence over the event's status as caesura or rupture; a status that would appear to follow on from the assertion of the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

#### 4. 3. COVENANT AND HISTORY:

Fackenheim's religious response to the Holocaust is contextualised within an interpretation of Jewish history. He argues that Judaism arises from "root experiences" and is developed in response to a series of "epoch-making events". In many respects, this differentiation is very similar to Greenberg's analysis of Judaism as a dialectic between covenant promise and historical counter-testimony.

Root experiences are those events that call faith into existence or crucially influence it. Judaism's root experiences are thus the Exodus and the Giving of the Law

on Mount Sinai. A root experience has three recognisable characteristics. First, the event is connected with the present by the reliable testimony of those who witnessed it. Second, the event must be public. The Crossing of the Red Sea was witnessed and celebrated by Moses "and the people of Israel" (Ex. 15:1-18). Third, the event is accessible through its reenactment in the present. The Exodus is reenacted every Passover Seder, when it again becomes a present reality. Such experiences inspire both joy and terror as they bear witness to the Saving and Commanding Presence of God. The latter inspires joy and terror because it both destroys and creates human freedom:

Such a Presence is ... nothing short of paradoxical. For being commanding it addresses human freedom. And being **sole Power**, it **destroys** that freedom because it is only human. Yet the freedom destroyed is also required.<sup>25</sup>

The covenant bears witness to both the Saving and Commanding Presence of God. As a result, it revolves around three contradictions: divine transcendence and divine immanence; divine power and human freedom; and divine involvement in history and the continuing existence of evil. The last of these three contradictions evolves in response to a series of epoch-making events.

Epoch-making events reflect the counter-testimony of history: the confrontation between the faith created by root experiences and the reality of the historical present. Such events do not constitute root experiences because they do not initiate a new faith, but inspire the reformulation of an already existing faith:

In its millennial career the Jewish faith has passed through many epoch-making events, such as the end of prophecy and the destruction of the first Temple, the Maccabean revolt, the destruction of the second Temple, the expulsion from Spain. These events each made a new claim upon the Jewish faith and, indeed, would not be epoch-making if it were otherwise. They did not, however, produce a new faith. What occurred instead was a confrontation in which the old faith was tested in the light of contemporary experience.<sup>26</sup>

Prior to the Holocaust, there were three responses to epoch-making experiences, each being a development from

the other. The first interpreted disaster as punishment for sin. The second rejected this response, preferring to interpret suffering as the result of the Hiding of God's Face. The third regarded the Hiding of God's Face as inadequate, on the grounds that the separation of humanity from the divine presence appeared to be permanent. The third response therefore appealed to the concept of the **Shekhinah**; the divine presence was with Israel in exile and shared her suffering. Israel looked forward to a messianic future when the divine presence would again become manifest.

Fackenheim argues that rabbinic reliance on Midrash is a response to the elusiveness of the divine presence. Midrash is the theological response to a fragmentary divine presence. The reliance on stories and parables "points to and articulates a life lived with problems and paradox".<sup>26</sup> The response to epoch-making events is increasingly paradoxical and fragmentary; a fact reflected in the cautious approach adopted towards the messianic future:

one wonders whether for the rabbis even the messianic future, which will reveal all, will explain all. Will it explain the death of even a single child?<sup>28</sup>

Fackenheim suggests that an ambivalent attitude is adopted to both moments of promise and counter-testimony: neither cancels out nor explains the other.

Against this background, the Holocaust is interpreted as the supreme epoch-making event. The fragmentary divine presence is in danger of becoming "wholly lost".<sup>29</sup> The event itself is "unredeemable".<sup>30</sup> As the supreme epoch-making event, the Holocaust is both meaningless and bears witness to the Commanding Presence of God. As the former, it creates a total rupture in the Jewish faith:

The event ... resists explanation--the historical kind that seeks causes, and the theological kind that seeks meaning and purpose. More precisely, the better the mind succeeds with the necessary task of explaining what can be explained, the more it is shattered by its ultimate failure.<sup>31</sup>

However, despite this rupture, there is an element of continuity: the Commanding Voice of God is heard even in the Holocaust. Jewish faith can only continue in response to this Voice. The question that arises is, if the event marks total rupture--to the extent that faith is only possible in response to the Commanding Voice heard in the Holocaust--then why does Fackenheim not grant the event the status of a root experience? If the Holocaust threatens the destruction of the Jewish faith, to the extent that only a "new revelation"--the "614th Commandment"--enables it to survive, then does it not constitute something more than an epoch-making event?

4. 4. THE 614th COMMANDMENT:

the authentic Jew of today is forbidden to hand Hitler yet another posthumous victory....we are, first, commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, second, to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the Holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with Him or with belief in Him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted. To abandon any of these imperatives, in response to Hitler's victory at Auschwitz, would be to hand him yet other, posthumous victories.<sup>32</sup>

The "614th Commandment" provided the substance of Fackenheim's first major entry into the debate concerning the Holocaust. It has remained both his most well-known statement on the subject and his most contentious. Michael Oppenheim suggests that the statement's popularity stems from the fact that it articulates the concerns of the North American Jewish community. The 614th Commandment provides both a justification for remaining Jewish, and an explanation of what is distinctive about the Jews as a group: they are those who were potential victims of the Holocaust. Fackenheim offers a positive sense of identity to an acculturated community.<sup>33</sup> It is arguable that he provides a theological interpretation of the North American Jews' communal life.<sup>34</sup> Criticism of the 614th

Commandment takes two forms: criticism of the concept of an additional commandment, and criticism of Fackenheim's four imperatives.

Fackenheim initially argues that the Holocaust bears witness to the Commanding, but not the Saving Presence of God: "Transcendence is found at Auschwitz in the form of absolute command."<sup>35</sup> The Commanding Presence in the Holocaust takes the form of a 614th Commandment prohibiting granting Hitler "posthumous victories". The murder of six million Jews was a victory for Hitler; one that must not be allowed to recur. Fackenheim argues that this imperative is of parallel importance to the traditional 613 commandments given on Mount Sinai. He acknowledges that it would have been preferable if the commandment was positive rather than negative. The reference to Hitler is essential as it serves as a reminder of the unique status of the Holocaust:

although the name of Hitler should be erased rather than remembered, we cannot disguise the uniqueness of his evil under a comfortable generality, such as persecution-in-general, tyranny-in-general, or even the demonic-in-general.<sup>36</sup>

As a formula, the 614th Commandment, although inadequate, must suffice.

General criticism of this formula takes two directions. The first mistakes Fackenheim's intentions, assuming that he is arguing that Jews should keep their faith in defiance of Hitler's attempt to exterminate World Jewry. Michael Wyschogrod argues that:

What was incumbent upon me was to destroy Hitler, but once this is accomplished, the free choice of every individual is restored and no further Hitler-derived burdens rest upon the non-believing Jew.<sup>37</sup>

However, Fackenheim's point is that the Holocaust proves such "free choice" to be an illusion. The Nuremberg Laws defined Jewishness on the basis of "race", rather than religion, thus presenting post-Holocaust Jews with a dilemma:

if a post-Holocaust Jew continues to bring up children, he is implicated in the possible murder of his great-grandchildren, for what was once possible

is possible ever after. And if, refusing to be implicated in murder, he has no children, he does his share in making an end to both Jews and Judaism. Collectively, then, the post-Holocaust Jew is either a potential murderer or a suicide: either way Hitler wins.<sup>38</sup>

In effect, Fackenheim employs the Nuremberg Laws as the basis of post-Holocaust Jewish existence. The 614th Commandment is thus an imperative addressed to all those who would have been considered Jewish by the Nazis. It ignores the differentiation between secular and religious Jews.

A second line of criticism arises concerning the precise status of the 614th Commandment. Is it a literal or a metaphorical commandment? Traditionally, a **mitzvah** is spoken by God. Is the 614th Commandment to be equated with revelation? Or is it a form of **halacha**? Fackenheim acknowledges that the 614th Commandment was neither spoken, nor received publicly--as in the case of the Giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. The suspicion remains that the 614th Commandment represents an existential response to catastrophe, in the same way that many of the Midrashim concerning the **Shekhinah** were written in response to the destruction of the Second Temple and the failure of the Bar Kochba revolt. Fackenheim argues that the 614th Commandment stands apart from such Midrashim: it is a response to an unprecedented rupture in Jewish history. However, does the Commandment contain any new revelation? The command to survive as Jews has been present throughout Jewish history:

did Judaism and the Jewish people need Auschwitz and its correlative "commandment" to be under this obligation? Has not Jewish survival always been deemed a Divine Imperative by the rabbinic tradition? How else explain Jewish survival in the face of all that the Jewish people have encountered?<sup>39</sup>

Fackenheim would respond by arguing that the rupture created by the Holocaust adds a radical sense of urgency. Richard Rubenstein and John Roth suggest that the difference lies in the existential impact of the Holocaust



upon Fackenheim. The 614th Commandment encapsulates a response to the Holocaust in the language of Jewish faith:

**It is perhaps best to see Fackenheim's 614th commandment as a cri de coeur transmuted into the language of the sacred.** That would at least help to explain why it has touched so many Jews so deeply.<sup>40</sup>

One final criticism of Fackenheim's formulation concerns the propriety of identifying a Commanding, but not a Saving Presence in the Holocaust. Michael Berenbaum notes that the God who commands at Sinai is the same God who saved at the Red Sea: the power to command arises from the preceding saving action. Even if the establishment of the State of Israel is interpreted as a saving action, the biblical model is still working in reverse. The question arises as to whether a God who commands and then saves (if indeed He saves at all) has the same integrity as a saving God who then commands.<sup>41</sup> Fackenheim acknowledges the force of this argument in his subsequent attempts to locate a divine saving presence in the Holocaust. (see 4. 5)

The 614th Commandment consists of four imperatives. Of these, the first has provoked the greatest controversy.

1. We are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish:

Fackenheim asserts that the post-Holocaust Jew is faced with a dilemma: if he brings up children, they will be potential victims of a future Holocaust; if he has no children, then he contributes "in making an end to both Jews and Judaism". From this, he concludes that there is no longer a sharp distinction between secular and religious Jews:

in the age of Auschwitz a Jewish commitment to Jewish survival is a monumental act of faithfulness, as well as a monumental, albeit as yet fragmentary, act of faith.<sup>42</sup>

Both religious and secular Jews respond to the 614th Commandment: the religious Jew through continuing to bear witness to God's presence in history; the secular Jew through a commitment to Jewish survival.



The question arises as to whether an additional commandment was required to ensure Jewish survival. Religious Jews have always regarded Jewish survival as a divine imperative. Neither need the commitment of secular Jews to Jewish survival be ascribed to a 614th Commandment:

Jewish secularism, with its national and ethnic identification, existed long before the Holocaust, when surely no voice from Auschwitz could be heard. In such circles, assimilation was resisted, partly because of a genuine and deep pride in the historic contribution of the Jewish people to civilization and, partly ... because assimilation was never quite as possible as Fackenheim would seem to think it was and is.<sup>43</sup>

Second, a post-Holocaust commitment to Jewish survival can be understood without reference to a 614th Commandment. The Jewish commitment to survival and to the State of Israel can be interpreted as determination to be self-reliant. The experience of the Holocaust convinced many Jews that they could not rely on outside help for their survival. The reaction of Jews to the events of 1948, 1967, and 1973 can be interpreted without reference to a wider metaphysical framework:

the engagement of the Sho'ah as "context" for Israeli behavior, which is always something to be remembered, does not necessitate the additional metaphysics of theism and revelation and all that they entail. Wanting to live, not wanting to be murdered, is reason enough.<sup>44</sup>

This brief analysis of Fackenheim's position serves to highlight the truth of Oppenheim's observation that Fackenheim offers a theological rationale for the actions of the Jewish community. Jews already regarded Jewish survival as imperative prior to 1967. Fackenheim's 614th Commandment offered a justification or explanation for this commitment, hence its popularity. Thus, the 614th Commandment expresses the Jewish community's commitment to survival, rather than calls it into being.

2. We are commanded ... to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the Holocaust, lest their memory perish:

Few, if any, critics would disagree with Fackenheim's second imperative. The need to remember both the Holocaust and its victims is a theme that permeates both Jewish life (the creation of **Yom HaShoah**, the establishment of Yad Vashem) and Holocaust literature. The Nazis aimed to wipe out both the Jews and their memory. Thus, the testimony of diarists such as Chaim Kaplan, Emmanuel Ringelblum, and the **Sonderkommando** constituted an "act of war against fascism".<sup>45</sup> In perpetuating the memory of the victims, post-Holocaust Jews ensure the failure of the Nazi intention that "Millions would be as though they had never been."<sup>46</sup>

3. We are forbidden to ... deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with Him or with belief in Him, lest Judaism perish:

Fackenheim acknowledges that the Holocaust poses a profound challenge to religious belief. His response is to appeal to the biblical model of contention with God:

How shall we live with God after Auschwitz? How without him? Contend with God we must, as did Abraham, Jacob, Job. And we cannot let him go.<sup>47</sup>

The danger of this position is that it marginalises those who can "let him go". Rubenstein and Roth suggest that the result has been

to limit meaningful theological debate on the Holocaust within the Jewish community to those who could affirm, as did Fackenheim, that the God of Israel was somehow present at Auschwitz.<sup>48</sup>

The former is speaking from bitter personal experience, having been accused of handing Hitler "yet other posthumous victories". The phrasing of Fackenheim's imperative is also open to criticism. The implication is that despair is forbidden out of negative reasons: fear of the consequences, rather than for any positive reason.<sup>49</sup>

4. We are forbidden ... to despair of the world as the place which is to become the Kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is irrelevant and everything is permitted:

As with the above, Fackenheim intends this injunction to be positive. The danger lies in its negative overtones: it marginalises those who regard the Holocaust as proof that "God is irrelevant and everything is permitted". The problem with both imperatives is that Fackenheim speaks from within the circle of faith, and fails to acknowledge the integrity of those who do not share his convictions. Fackenheim's injunctions against despair are only convincing to those who share his faith. He suggests that those who do not hear the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz choose not to:

In my view, nothing less will do than to say that a commanding Voice speaks from Auschwitz, and that there are Jews who hear it and Jews who stop their ears.<sup>50</sup>

Fackenheim ignores the fact that those who "hear" do not need persuading, whereas those who do not may be genuinely unable to locate any divine presence in the Holocaust. For many, the problem is how to continue believing in the face of the silence of God during the Holocaust. In such a context, Fackenheim's certitude seems at best misplaced:

to talk of a God of deliverance, no matter how softly, no matter how tentatively after the Holocaust is problematic when God did not work His kindness there and then. To even whisper about salvation after Treblinka and Maidanek is already to speak as a man of faith, not as a seeker, and even then one can only whisper.<sup>51</sup>

As was the case with Berkovits, Fackenheim ultimately resolves the tension between belief and unbelief in favour of the former.

Fackenheim could also be accused of failing to draw the logical conclusions from his own analysis of the Holocaust. If the Holocaust is unique because it illustrates a hitherto untapped level of evil, could not the event bear witness to a demonic, rather than a commanding Presence? Fackenheim frequently refers to the

demonic character of Nazism ("evil for evil's sake", "the demons of Auschwitz", "hell surpassed"), but ignores the possibility of either a form of dualism, or the existence of evil within the divine nature:

If we are to count the Sho'ah as revelation is it not the power of Satan that is disclosed rather than that of the "living God"? That is to say, does not a methodology that seeks **revelation**, a new commandment, in Auschwitz need to confront the negative reality there divulged? And if so what does this do to the Jewish faith?<sup>52</sup>

The problem arises, in part, from Fackenheim's insistence that the Holocaust bears witness to a Commanding, but not a Saving Presence. Without a corresponding Saving Presence, the suspicion remains that a Commanding or revelatory presence in the Holocaust can only be negative.

The 614th Commandment forms the basis of Fackenheim's response to the Holocaust in **God's Presence in History** and **The Jewish Return Into History. To Mend the World** marks a significant development in Fackenheim's position: he introduces the idea of a Saving Presence alongside the Commanding Voice, thus attempting to respond to some of the criticisms of the 614th Commandment.

#### 4. 5. TIKKUN OLAM: TO MEND THE WORLD:

The Nazi logic of destruction was irresistible: **it was, nevertheless, being resisted**. This logic is a **novum** in human history, the source of an unprecedented, abiding horror: but resistance to it on the part of the most radically exposed, too, is a **novum** in history. **To hear and obey the commanding Voice of Auschwitz is an "ontological" possibility, here and now, because the hearing and obeying was already an "ontic" reality, then and there.**<sup>53</sup>

In **To Mend the World**, Fackenheim interprets the Holocaust as a dialectic between rupture and **Tikkun**. The Holocaust creates a "total rupture" with all that went before, throwing human understanding into question. The Holocaust shatters our philosophical and theological categories, as in the case of the **Muselmann** and the "Idea of Humanity". Fackenheim's defence of the uniqueness of the Holocaust is employed to support the claim that the event is "total rupture". The effect of this rupture is to render the

existing religious framework incapable of incorporating the Holocaust. The concept of the **Shekhinah** is no longer an adequate description of the divine presence, neither is the Lurianic notion of **Tikkun** capable of describing the redemptive task of repair:

For centuries the kabbalists practiced their **Tikkun**, their "impulse below"--"Torah, prayer and **mitzvot**"--calling forth an "impulse from above": in the Holocaust their bodies, their souls and their **Tikkun** were all indiscriminately murdered. No **Tikkun** is possible of that rupture, ever after.<sup>54</sup>

By removing the element of choice, the Nazis denied their victims the possibility of martyrdom, or of a meaningful religious response: those practising **Tikkun**, whether the Hasidic Jews of Eastern Europe or Orthodox Jews such as Elchonon Wassermann, met the same fate as assimilated or converted Jews. Those who survived were not the hoped for "holy remnant", but rather an "accidental remnant".<sup>55</sup>

The "novum" of this rupture would be sufficient to end faith, but for the existence of a parallel "novum": resistance "on the part of the most radically exposed". Fackenheim acknowledges that a Commanding Presence is an insufficient foundation for post-Holocaust Jewish existence, unless he can also point to a Saving Presence. Such a presence is equated with Jewish resistance, both armed and spiritual, to the Holocaust. This resistance is a "novum", because the Nazi system was irresistible. In the Holocaust, the Nazis employed the legal and physical resources of the Third Reich. By comparison, the Jews were isolated, disorganised, and without resources. Since the Jewish "crime" was existence, resistance took the form of the Sanctification of Life. Such resistance could take the form of armed opposition, a commitment to **Jewish** life (in the form of the spiritual resistance of religious Jews), or a commitment to life per se. Thus, Fackenheim defines resistance to include the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the Treblinka revolt, the action of the **Sonderkommando** in blowing up one of the crematoria at Auschwitz, and the prayer, dancing and singing of the Hasidim. Both kinds of action oppose the planned dehumanization of the Jews.

Fackenheim concludes that all actions of resistance constitute **Tikkunim**--acts of repair or restoration, and as such, form the basis of any post-Holocaust **Tikkun**. Indeed, **Tikkun** is only possible **after** the Holocaust, because such actions had already occurred **during** it. Thus, the 614th Commandment is valid because a similar imperative was heard during the Holocaust. Fackenheim cites the testimony of a Polish Catholic in Auschwitz, Pelagia Lewinska:

They had condemned us to die in our own filth, to drown in mud, in our own excrement. They wished to abuse us, to destroy our human dignity. From the instant when I grasped the motivating principle ... it was as if I had awakened from a dream....I felt under orders to live and if I did die at Auschwitz, it would be as a human being. I would hold onto my dignity.<sup>56</sup>

The command to survive as Jews is thus rooted in the testimony of the Holocaust. Thus, the rupture created by the figure of the **Muselmann** is partially mended by the testimony of Lewinska. Belief in humanity as the image of God can be restored, in part, because it was repaired by the **Tikkun** that took place during the Holocaust:

The Idea of Man can be--has been--destroyed. But because humanity itself **has been** mended--**in** some men and women **by** some men and women--the Idea of Man can be mended.<sup>57</sup>

Fackenheim applies a similar principle to his understanding of Christianity. The Holocaust is a rupture, challenging the continuing credibility of Christianity. However, as with the "Idea of Man", a **Tikkun** of Christianity is possible, because acts of **Tikkun** occurred during the Holocaust. The existence of Righteous Gentiles provides the basis for the repair or restoration of Christianity:

The twelve years of the Third Reich were a unique devil's **kairos** in the history of the Christian church. They were also, potentially a unique **kairos** of God, in that even a silent, secret Christian prayer on behalf of Jews, whenever it was sincerely spoken, had a redemptive effect on the Christian soul.<sup>58</sup>

This **Tikkun** can only be partial: the legacy of Christian anti-Jewish teaching cannot be forgotten; but serves to

offer a more positive picture of Christianity's future than that presented by Eliezer Berkovits.

Fackenheim's position in **To Mend the World** is both more positive and more negative than the one he adopted earlier. It is more positive: he locates a Saving Presence in the Holocaust, however fragmentary. It is more negative, because he acknowledges that any post-Holocaust **Tikkun** can only ever be partial: "we cannot live, after the Holocaust, as men and women have lived before".<sup>59</sup>

Ironically, in responding to his critics by developing his position, Fackenheim has attracted renewed criticism: his emphasis on **Tikkun** has received only slightly less criticism than that directed at the 614th Commandment. There is a striking parallel between criticism of this reliance on **Tikkun** and that levelled at Berkovits' distinction between "authentic" and "inauthentic" Jews: both thinkers are accused of "privileging" one set of testimony (that of physical and spiritual resistance) over the mute testimony of the **Muselmanner**. For Fackenheim, the consequence of such "privileging" is to "mend" or undermine the rupture posited in the first instance.

There are a number of difficulties with Fackenheim's treatment of resistance. First, in making such resistance a philosophical category (the basis of post-Holocaust **Tikkun**), he removes its context. The examples of resistance he cites stand out because of their sparsity. However, in making such acts "The Foundations of Future Jewish Thought" (to quote the subtitle of **To Mend the World**), Fackenheim grants them the status of an absolute; a fact that loses sight of the ambiguity and abysmal character of the circumstances that called forth the response in the first place.<sup>60</sup> Oppenheim suggests that Fackenheim's strategy be set against the reverence of the wider Jewish community towards those who did resist the Nazis:

Fackenheim gives theological expression to the communal emotions of amazement and awe in response to those who were able to resist. He puts into words



the community's sense that such acts had both a human and a divine source, as well as its belief that when Jews today act to heal a still broken world their actions are a continuation of that earlier resistance to the Nazi effort to eradicate the human element in our world.<sup>61</sup>

Such a positive interpretation is valid, but is only a partial truth. There is a need to counterbalance such positive memories with negative ones of the **Muselmänner**. The "foundations of future Jewish thought" have to incorporate both the positive and the negative testimony of the Holocaust. Thus, Oppenheim suggests that Fackenheim misrepresents the reality of the Holocaust by presenting a partial view. A response to the Holocaust needs to incorporate both the positive testimony of resistance and the negative testimony of those who were dehumanized, or who felt only the divine absence or silence:

in seriously examining the Holocaust we do not have the power to say that God was there. It was not enough, because we also sometimes feel driven to say that God was absent. If Fackenheim were to suggest that what he is offering is a midrash / story and if he coupled it with another midrash / story about God being absent, then we would feel that a fundamental truth has been expressed.<sup>62</sup>

The problem lies in Fackenheim's programmatic usage of positive testimony to constitute the "foundations of future Jewish thought", thus suggesting an absolute status that is not granted to corresponding negative testimony.

The consequence of Fackenheim's emphasis on positive testimony is that, despite his intentions to the contrary, he implicitly denigrates negative testimony. This implicit denigration occurs despite Fackenheim's definition of the uniqueness of the Holocaust as the "creation" of the **Muselmann**:

However admirable, exemplary and reorienting is the testimony of resistance, its categorical and ontological privileging necessarily excludes and negates the claims of other testimonies to the event. Although Fackenheim in no way wants to slight or make secondary the mute testimony of the **Muselmänner**, his privileging of physical and spiritual resistance issues in such a denigration. This denigration is the other side of the legislative character of the testimony of resistance when privileged. The logic of privileging

necessarily implies that something else is excluded or made secondary.<sup>63</sup>

By implicitly excluding negative testimony, Fackenheim ignores those voices that would challenge his theory that **Tikkun** is possible on the basis of resistance during the Holocaust. The logical corollary of this position would be to argue that **Tikkun** is impossible because it was impossible then for the **Muselmänner**. Indeed, Fackenheim alludes to the possibility of this being the case. In **What is Judaism**, he remarks :

Only if we share in the anguish of the victims dare we affirm their resurrection. Only then dare we affirm the resurrection of anyone. For if the world does not exist for them, it does not exist at all.<sup>64</sup>

The victims incorporate both those who resisted and those who did not. Is it meaningful to talk of sharing the anguish of either? The testimony of the **Muselmann** is mute by definition, so how is such anguish to be comprehended, let alone shared?

In considering Fackenheim's treatment of positive and negative testimony, Susan Shapiro notes that he effectively ignores the whole question of the state of language after the Holocaust. In **To Mend the World**, he fails to address the question of whether language itself is ruptured by the Holocaust. Does not language itself stand in need of "mending", as well as philosophy and theology? Fackenheim notes that

The Holocaust ... is a whole of horror. A transcending comprehension of it is impossible, for it would rest on the prior dissolution of a horror that is indissoluble.<sup>65</sup>

However, in proposing a **Tikkun** of philosophy and theology on the basis of the positive testimony of resistance, he assumes something analogous to a "transcending comprehension":

Whereas Fackenheim proclaims that the Holocaust breaks the continuity between past and present and totally ends philosophical intelligibility, his interpretive assumptions assume the continuity he explicitly declares to be ruptured.<sup>66</sup>

Shapiro suggests that the conclusion of **To Mend the World** marks the "suturing and closing" of the rupture generated by the negative testimony of the **Muselmänner**. Fackenheim ignores the possibility that the Holocaust might rupture language itself; a theme that dominates both Holocaust literature and literary critical accounts of the Holocaust.<sup>67</sup>

CONCLUSION:

Fackenheim's response to the Holocaust represents a prodigious effort to grapple with the implications of the event. It is a response that has touched, or reflects, the thinking of the wider Jewish community. However, the difficulty lies, as with Berkovits, in Fackenheim's orthodoxy. He allows the certitude of faith to result in the implicit denigration of the negative responses of those who do not share his faith. In both cases, the problem is one of being one-sided and saying too much.<sup>68</sup> In attempting to locate theological meaning in the Holocaust, both Fackenheim and Berkovits tend to ignore the integrity of those who cannot identify such meaning. Fackenheim is aware of the danger of rejecting faith (Rubenstein) or of a too-easy affirmation of God's presence (Berkovits):

Not accidentally, "Holocaust theology" has been moving toward two extremes--a "God-is-dead" kind of despair, and a faith for which, having been "with God in hell", either nothing has happened or all is mended. However, post-Holocaust thought--it includes theological concerns but is not confined to them--must dwell, however painfully and precariously, between the extremes, and seek a **Tikkun** as it endures them.<sup>69</sup>

The irony is that, in seeking such a **Tikkun**, Fackenheim is tempted, however unintentionally, to resolve, rather than endure, this tension.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Michael Oppenheim, 'Can We Still Stay With Him? Two Jewish Theologians Confront the Holocaust', **Studies in Religion**, 1987, 16: 4, 405-19, 406-10; 'Theology and Community: The Work of Emil Fackenheim', **Religious Studies Review**, 1987, 13: 3, 206-10, 206-8; Richard L. Rubenstein and John Roth, **Approaches to Auschwitz**, 316-21.
2. The introduction to Emil L. Fackenheim, **Quest for Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Theology**, New York: Beacon Press, 1968, 3-26, cited in Oppenheim, 'Theology and Community', 206.
3. Emil L. Fackenheim, 'The Development of My Thought', **Religious Studies Review**, 1987, 13: 3, 204-6, 204-5.
4. Fackenheim, *ibid.* 205; Emil L. Fackenheim, **To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought**, New York: Schocken Books, 1982, 9-10.
5. Fackenheim, 'The Development of My Thought', 205.
6. Fackenheim, **To Mend the World**, 13.
7. Steven T. Katz, **Post-Holocaust Dialogues**, 212.
8. Irving L. Horowitz, 'Many Genocides and One Holocaust?', **Modern Judaism**, 1981, 1: 1, 74-89, 74-5, 80-5.
9. Emil L. Fackenheim, 'Concerning Authentic and Unauthentic Responses to the Holocaust', **Holocaust and Genocide Studies**, 1986, 1: 1, 101-20, 103.
10. In **To Mend the World**, Fackenheim cites five points of uniqueness; in the foreword to Yehuda Bauer's, **The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness**, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979, he cites eight. The number of points varies but the content is substantially the same.
11. Emil L. Fackenheim, 'Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future', **Judaism**, 1967, 16: 3, 266-99, 289.
12. Fackenheim, **To Mend the World**, 12.
13. Horowitz, 'Many Genocides and One Holocaust', 76.
14. The nature of the Holocaust as a war of annihilation is illustrated by the title of Lucy Dawidowicz' study, **The War Against the Jews 1933-1945**, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975.
15. Emil L. Fackenheim, 'Holocaust and **Weltanschauung**: Philosophical Reflections on Why They Did It', **Holocaust and Genocide Studies**, 1988, 3: 2, 197-208, 201-3.
16. Emil L. Fackenheim, **What is Judaism?**, New York: Summit Books, 1987, 273.
17. Fackenheim, 'Concerning Authentic and Unauthentic Responses to the Holocaust', 104.
18. Fackenheim, **To Mend the World**, 226.

19. Jean Améry, **At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities**, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld, cited in Fackenheim, **To Mend the World**, 271.
20. Fackenheim, *ibid.* 205.
21. Emil L. Fackenheim, **God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections**, New York: New York University Press, 1970, 74.
22. Michael Wyschogrod, 'Faith and the Holocaust', 293.
23. Fackenheim, **God's Presence in History**, 73.
24. Horowitz, 'Many Genocides and One Holocaust?', 80.
25. Fackenheim, **God's Presence in History**, 15.
26. *Ibid.* 8-9.
27. Emil L. Fackenheim, **The Jewish Return Into History**, 263-4.
28. Fackenheim, **God's Presence in History**, 40.
29. *Ibid.* 79.
30. Fackenheim, **The Jewish Return Into History**, 252.
31. *Ibid.* 279.
32. Fackenheim, 'Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future', 272.
33. Oppenheim, 'Theology and Community', 206-7.
34. Fackenheim is emphatic that, after the Holocaust, Jewish life is in advance of Jewish thought. See **To Mend the World**, 15.
35. Fackenheim, **Jewish Return Into History**, 109.
36. Fackenheim, 'Jewish Values in the Post-Future', 272.
37. Wyschogrod, 'Faith and the Holocaust', 289.
38. Fackenheim, 'The Development of My Thought', 205.
39. Katz, **Post-Holocaust Dialogues**, 219.
40. Rubenstein and Roth, **Approaches to Auschwitz**, 321.
41. Michael Berenbaum, **The Vision of the Void**, 157.
42. Fackenheim, **The Jewish Return Into History**, 31.
43. Wyschogrod, 'Faith and the Holocaust', 289.
44. Katz, **Post-Holocaust Dialogues**, 233.
45. Primo Levi, **The Drowned and the Saved**, trans. Raymond Rosenthal, London: Michael Joseph, 1988, 7.
46. Fackenheim, **God's Presence in History**, 85.
47. Fackenheim, **The Jewish Return Into History**, 48.
48. Rubenstein and Roth, **Approaches to Auschwitz**, 320.
49. Berenbaum, **The Vision of the Void**, 160.
50. Fackenheim, **The Jewish Return Into History**, 31.

51. Katz, **Post-Holocaust Dialogues**, 155.
52. Ibid. 225.
53. Fackenheim, **To Mend the World**, 25.
54. Ibid. 254.
55. Ibid. 308.
56. Ibid. 217.
57. Ibid. 276.
58. Ibid. 290.
59. Ibid. 254.
60. See Susan E. Shapiro, 'For Thy Breach is Great Like the Sea; Who Can Heal Thee?', **Religious Studies Review**, 1987, 13: 3, 210-3, 211; Lawrence L. Langer, **Versions of Survival**, 67-102.
61. Oppenheim, 'Theology and Community', 207.
62. Oppenheim, 'Can We Still Stay with Him?', 412-3.
63. Shapiro, 'For Thy Breach is Great Like the Sea', 211.
64. Fackenheim, **What is Judaism?**, 274.
65. Fackenheim, **To Mend the World**, 27-8.
66. Shapiro, 'For Thy Breach is Great Like the Sea', 212.
67. See Susan E. Shapiro, 'Hearing the Testimony of Radical Negation', in eds. E. Schüssler Fiorenza and D. Tracy, **The Holocaust as Interruption**, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984, 3-10; Elie Wiesel, 'Why I Write', in eds. A. H. Rosenfeld and I. Greenberg, **Confronting the Holocaust: The Impact of Elie Wiesel**, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978, 200-6.
68. Oppenheim, 'Can We Still Stay with Him?', 406.
69. Fackenheim, **To Mend the World**, 309-10.

PART TWO. ELIE WIESEL: A SHATTERED VISION.

INTRODUCTION:

Ironically, and particularly in the United States, the most influential thinker on the religious implications of the Holocaust is neither a theologian nor a philosopher, but a novelist: Elie Wiesel. The ideas of Wiesel have proved to have a far greater resonance, among both Jews and non-Jews, than those of Rubenstein, Berkovits, and Fackenheim. Peter Haas identifies three major factors in accounting for Wiesel's greater popularity. First, as a survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, he speaks from personal experience of the Holocaust. By contrast, Rubenstein is a native American, whereas both Berkovits and Fackenheim were refugees from Nazi Germany prior to the outbreak of war. The latter was briefly incarcerated in Sachsenhausen, but neither he nor Berkovits had personal experience of the ghettos and deathcamps of Eastern Europe. As a survivor of the deathcamps, Wiesel is credited with a privileged status the other three lack. Second, he differs in coming from an Eastern European background. Rubenstein, Berkovits, and Fackenheim share a common Western European educational heritage. Their responses are grounded in Western philosophy. Wiesel comes from the Shtetl-culture of Eastern Europe, his educational background being that of the Yeshiva--Talmudic highschool. His Talmudic background is overlaid by an early immersion in mysticism, both that of the Witzsnitzer Hasidim and Lurianic Kabbalah. Although the messianic fervour of his childhood has gone, the fascination with mysticism remains. Wiesel differs further in approaching the Holocaust on a deeply personal, rather than an intellectual level. In both writing and lecturing, he shares with his audience both his personal experience and quest for understanding. Therefore, rather than suggesting possible foundations for "future Jewish thought", he reflects the anguish and doubts generated by the Holocaust among believers. Third, Wiesel's Eastern European background and personal style combine in his choice of medium. He articulates his response to the Holocaust through literature, rather than formal theology or



philosophy. He is primarily a novelist and essayist, adopting a style influenced by both Midrash and the tales of the Hasidic Masters. In the majority of his writing, Wiesel fuses history and legend in a style reminiscent of Midrashic embellishments on the biblical stories. He describes himself as a witness and teller of tales, believing that it is his vocation to testify to the counter-testimony of the Holocaust. In doing so, he stands in the tradition of witnesses to past tragedies, but differs in that he suspects that the Holocaust shatters the covenantal framework. Rather than reincarnating the covenant, Wiesel strives to re-create it in the aftermath of God's silence during the Holocaust.

Thus, Wiesel does not offer a formal religious response to the Holocaust. His response gradually emerges in his writing and lectures. He lacks the confidence of Rubenstein, Berkovits, and Fackenheim in the continuing wholeness of belief. Rubenstein is prepared to dispense with the content, if not the form, of covenantal faith in its entirety. Although Berkovits and Fackenheim emphasise the need to be consistent with both the belief and unbelief generated during the Holocaust, they ultimately sacrifice the latter in their eagerness to emphasise the former. Wiesel differs in continuing to testify to the shattering impact of the Holocaust. His novels and essays chart the search for a form of belief meaningful after the Holocaust. He emphatically rejects Rubenstein's break with the covenantal framework, but is equally adamant in refusing fully to endorse the tradition. Wiesel strives to incorporate the anguish of those who lost their belief during the Holocaust into his understanding of the covenant, and does this with greater success than either Berkovits or Fackenheim. Rather than reinterpreting the covenant, he asks what elements of the tradition continue to be meaningful in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Wiesel's religious thought cannot be considered independently of his literary strategy. Thus, this section

commences with a survey of Wiesel's literary style, before proceeding to an analysis of his religious response to the Holocaust.

5. ELIE WIESEL: A "DIVIDED VOICE":

- 5. 1. INTRODUCTION,
- 5. 2. THE TELLER OF TALES.
- 5. 3. WRITING AS A TOMBSTONE TO THE DEAD.
- 5. 4. THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE.
- 5. 5. REFORMULATING THE TRADITION.

5. 1. INTRODUCTION:

Wiesel's work is a sustained dramatization of counterpositions, a long monologue disguised as a series of dialogues, revealing his own divided self. His inconsistency is both real and imagined, the reflection of a writer who feels trapped by two necessities--to speak and to hold his tongue--and who incorporates this very tension into the substance of his vision.<sup>1</sup>

The literary critic, Lawrence Langer coins the term a "divided voice" to refer<sup>to</sup> the series of tensions inherent in Wiesel's literary style. There is a tension between the desire to remain silent, out of both respect for the six million dead and in response to the scale of the disaster, and the compulsion to speak, both to bear witness to those who died and to warn against potential repetitions. A further tension exists between Wiesel's pre-Holocaust faith and the disillusionment and anguish generated by the Holocaust. The survivor is further torn between memories of his past and those who died, and the need to re-create a life in the present. Wiesel incorporates this series of tensions into the substance of his vision. His novels, in particular, can be interpreted as "an act of chorus, of dialogue"<sup>2</sup>, offering a series of alternative responses to these tensions.

Wiesel's prolific output spreads over a variety of genres: novels, plays, essays, and elaborations upon the biblical and Hasidic stories. However, his style remains consistent throughout, apart from occasional polemical essays. Wiesel's approach is primarily that of the storyteller, employing a fusion of history and legend characteristic of Midrash and Hasidism. This technique emphasises both the continuity and discontinuity between

Wiesel and the tradition. The style is traditional, but the content differs. Wiesel employs a traditional style to portray an unprecedented reality, and in so doing reformulates the tradition, so that biblical and hasidic tales bear witness to the Holocaust. The testimony of victims and survivors thus attains a comparable privileged status--as the "stories of a new Bible".<sup>3</sup>

Wiesel's literary strategy thus combines a number of elements. He sees himself as both a witness and a teller of tales; a self-understanding that governs the nature and content of his writing. He bears witness specifically to the Holocaust, both as the destruction of the *Shtetl*-culture of Eastern Europe, and as the dehumanization and extermination of six million individuals. Hence, the understanding of writing as an act of commemoration and re-creation: in writing he is building a tombstone to those who died. Wiesel's understanding of writing as commemoration and re-creation adds to the tensions concerning the use of language: can literature convey mass atrocity, or provide suitable commemoration of the dead? The inherent tensions in Wiesel's literary style become most evident in his use of Scripture and its archetypes.

#### 5. 2. THE TELLER OF TALES:

Let us tell tales so as not to allow the executioner to have the last word. The last word belongs to the victim.<sup>4</sup>

In assuming the role of witness and teller of tales, Wiesel acknowledges his continuing attachment to the Jewish tradition. As Chosen People, the Jews were called to bear witness to God's presence in history. The Jewish paradigm is one of testimony: the Exodus as the central event in Jewish history both establishes the covenant and calls the Chosen People to be witnesses. The centrality of the Exodus as testimony is reflected in the annual re-enactment of the Passover Seder. In the Torah and Talmud, a witness is one who both sees an event and reports it. Such a witness can be positive or negative. The Passover Seder constitutes a positive witness. The memory of historical disaster forms a negative witness. Hence, the

importance attached to remembering those who died for their faith, whether famous martyrs such as Rabbi Akiba, or those who were the victims of the numerous pogroms through the ages. In identifying the function of the teller of tales as the preservation of the victim's memory, Wiesel stands firmly within the Jewish tradition.

This tradition gained a new dimension in the Holocaust. The extermination of the Jews was intended to be, in Himmler's words, a "glorious, never to-be-written page in history". The Nazis went to great lengths to ensure that no trace would remain of their Jewish victims; hence the decision to cremate the bodies and scatter the ashes, either over the fields or in rivers, and the attempt to disguise the site of extermination camps such as Sobibor. Their victims responded by going to great lengths to record their own extermination, both in the ghettos and deathcamps. Many of these accounts were only uncovered after the war.<sup>5</sup> Bearing witness was both an attempt to combat Nazi policy, and an attempt to forge a link with the future:

They knew they would not survive, and most of them did not. But they wanted to be remembered. They wanted the tale to be told.<sup>6</sup>

In writing, the survivor strives to fulfil this aim. However, there is also a radical difference between the witness of a survivor, and that of a victim. The survivor lacks the "innocence" of the victim: he knows the end of the story and is aware of the full scale of the Holocaust. Wiesel suggests that a further difference lies in the fact that bearing witness offers the survivor an opportunity to impose meaning on his survival. Fackenheim noted that the survivors were an "accidental" rather than a "holy" remnant. Bearing witness offers a means of making sense of this accidental survival. Both Wiesel and Primo Levi espouse this point of view:

having survived by chance, I was duty bound to give meaning to my survival, to justify every moment of my life. I knew the story had to be told.<sup>7</sup>

Having decided to bear witness to the Holocaust, the question remains as to how this is to be done. Wiesel adopts literature as the most appropriate medium. He comments that his aim had always been to be a writer, but prior to the Holocaust, his goal had been to be a Talmudic scholar:

the pattern of my future had then seemed clear. I would pursue my studies in the same surroundings with the same zeal, probing the secret texts<sup>8</sup>.

His experience of the Holocaust led him to abandon this goal for that of a novelist. Wiesel chooses this form, rather than the more formal disciplines of philosophy or theology, because it allows him to explore possibilities without elaborating a systematic response:

Where are questions allowed to remain unanswered? In art, particularly in literature.<sup>9</sup>

Particularly in his novels, Wiesel considers a series of possible responses to the Holocaust. He avoids suggesting a programme for "future Jewish thought", preferring instead to consider the options open to survivors.

Thus, although Wiesel is considered a Holocaust writer, only one of his books directly addresses the subject. *Night* is both Wiesel's first book, and his only detailed account of his experiences in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. His subsequent books concentrate upon the options open to survivors after liberation. He suggests that *Night* is both the centre and a condensation of his work:

All the stories are one story except that I build them in concentric circles. The center is the same and is in *Night*.<sup>9</sup>

The experience of the Holocaust is assumed or alluded to. Subsequent novels adopt and elaborate upon one of the responses suggested in *Night*. The novels form two series. The first is a trilogy: *Night*, *Dawn*, *The Accident* (*Le Jour* in the original French), and concentrates on negative responses to the Holocaust. *Night* ends by comparing the author's appearance to that of a corpse.<sup>10</sup> *Dawn* and *The Accident* portray survivors who are incapable of dealing

positively with their memories. Hence, Wiesel's description of such survivors as "spiritual cripples" and "living dead":

These people have been amputated; they haven't lost their legs or eyes but their will and their taste for life. The things they have seen will come to the surface again sooner or later.<sup>11</sup>

The subsequent novels explore possibilities for a more positive accommodation between past and present. The survivor remains haunted by his memories, but these act as a spur toward reintegration into the community.

Wiesel's literary style is reminiscent of the Hasidic tale. Sidra Ezrahi notes three stylistic similarities: the relationship of master and disciple; the presence of a mysterious stranger, credited with mystical powers; and the recurrence of mystical attempts to force the Coming of the Messiah.<sup>12</sup> The majority of Wiesel's novels are dominated by dialogues between the protagonist and a mysterious stranger, who becomes a master-figure: Gad in *Dawn*; Pedro in *The Town Beyond the Wall* and *Twilight*; Gavriel-Gregor in *The Gates of the Forest*; Katriel in *A Beggar in Jerusalem*; and David Aboulesia in *The Testament*. Each of these figures is credited with exceptional powers and understanding. Each novel similarly portrays a mystic, modelled on the character of Moshe the Madman in *Night*. The emphasis upon mysticism is more obvious in some novels than others, forming the dominant theme in the last third of *The Town Beyond the Wall* and *The Gates of the Forest*.<sup>13</sup>

Each novel constitutes a dialogue between a number of possible responses to the Holocaust. The majority of these responses were hinted at in *Night*, and are then addressed in turn at greater length. Thus, *Dawn* considers the option of political action, in the form of involvement in the struggle to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. *The Accident* is concerned with the question of suicide as a response to the Holocaust. *The Town Beyond the Wall* and *Twilight* consider the attraction of a mystical form of madness. *The Town Beyond the Wall* marks a turning point in

Wiesel's fiction. In the previous two novels, the protagonist rejects any sense of responsibility to others. From **The Town Beyond the Wall** onwards, Wiesel's protagonists acknowledge their responsibility to others, and search for a means of combining their memories of the dead with a positive interest in the fate of others. **The Town Beyond the Wall; The Gates of the Forest; A Beggar in Jerusalem; and The Oath** all end with the protagonist committing himself to the well-being of one other individual; although all four novels end on an ambivalent note: there is no suggestion as to whether the commitment has positive results. The four novels end with this gesture of commitment; the suggestion being that such an act is an end in itself. **The Testament** and **The Fifth Son** extend the spectrum of response to include the children of survivors; a category briefly considered in **The Oath**.

In many cases, Wiesel's characters are little more than a voice, articulating a possible response. Hence Langer's assessment of Wiesel's work as "a long monologue disguised as a series of dialogues". The aim is to discover a way of bridging the gulf between pre and post-Holocaust life. Wiesel's protagonists are haunted by a sense of loss--of the Shtetl culture of Eastern Europe, of family and friends, and of the belief and values that shaped them. In this sense, his novels reflect his own literary strategy: he employs literature as a vehicle for exploring the tensions between the belief of his childhood, and the anguish and disillusionment generated by the Holocaust. In addition, Wiesel uses his novels to re-create both the Shtetl culture of Sighet where he was born, and the people who lived there.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Wiesel's adoption of the role of witness and teller of tales is intrinsically bound up with his understanding of literature as an act of commemoration and re-creation

### 5. 3. WRITING AS A TOMBSTONE TO THE DEAD:

for me writing is a **matzeva**, an invisible tombstone erected to the memory of the dead unburied. Each word corresponds to a face, a prayer, the one needing the other so as not to sink into oblivion.<sup>15</sup>



For many Holocaust writers, literature offers a means of commemorating the culture, communities, and individuals who were wiped out by the Nazis. A witness has been defined as one who both sees an event and reports it. However, the majority of those who saw and bore witness to the Holocaust were also among its victims. Judaism has a longstanding tradition of lamentation literature: the poet or writer giving voice to the community's sense of desolation and loss. However, what happens when both writer and audience are among the victims? The Holocaust bore witness to the extermination of roughly one third of World Jewry, including virtually the entire Shtetl-community of Eastern Europe. In addition, the Eastern European Jewish community was widely regarded as the spiritual centre of World Jewry. Thus, Holocaust writers of an Eastern European background feel compelled to both commemorate and strive to re-create the culture that was destroyed. The image of writing as a "tombstone" to the dead reflects the thorough nature of the Nazi policy of extermination: no trace was to be left, either of the process of extermination, or its victims. The thoroughness of the Holocaust combined with its scope, particularly in Eastern Europe, is reflected in the predominant use of graveyard-related imagery to depict the Holocaust. Eastern Europe was the cemetery of the Shtetl-culture, and yet the cremation of the victims' bodies meant that there were no physical remains. Thus, Sidra Ezrahi suggests that, for the Eastern European writer in particular, writing becomes a substitute for the formalities of mourning: it is necessary to re-create the victims' fate before mourning can take place.<sup>16</sup>

There is a longstanding lamentation tradition within Judaism. The biblical precedent is found in the book of Lamentations. Subsequent disasters were mourned through their commemoration in both liturgy and literature:

The massacres, forced conversions, crusades, expulsions, and pogroms that punctuate Jewish history from the time of the destruction of the First Temple till modern times were the subject of

an unbroken chain of liturgical elegies (**selihot** and **kinot**) and folktales (**midrashim**).<sup>17</sup>

The names of victims were remembered through their incorporation into the liturgy. Thus a **selihah** commemorating the victims of the Chmielnicki massacres was incorporated into the Lithuanian **selihot** liturgy. However, such lamentational literature combined the commemoration of the victims with a collective affirmation of faith. The liturgical commemoration of the victims was paralleled by a poetic commemoration, that did not necessarily incorporate a similar affirmation. The poet was regarded as the voice of the community's anguish. The most famous exponent of this public role was the poet, Chaim Nachmann Bialik (1873-1934). His poem "In the City of Slaughter" documents the pogrom that took occurred in Kishinev at Passover, 1903, when forty nine Jews were killed. In the words of Yitzhak Katzenelson:

Bialik saw our anguish, expressed it, and captured it for all times to come....Thanks to Bialik, our most profound [experiences] have been given eternal form and this has lifted a great burden from us.<sup>18</sup>

The effectiveness of this strategy for expressing public grief is evinced by the popularity of Bialik's work in the ghettos of Eastern Europe during the Holocaust.

The Jews in the ghettos, particularly those involved in armed resistance, looked for a poet of equal stature to Bialik to express their community's anguish. The Zionist youth organisations reprinted his poems. In his diary, Chaim Kaplan pleads that a poet will emerge of similar stature to Bialik to give voice to Warsaw Jewry's agony:

Our forefathers ... who were experienced in adversity, immortalized their sufferings in lamentations....A catastrophe that becomes part of poetry, even non-religious poetry such as Bialik's "The City of the Slaughter," which commemorated the Kishinev pogrom, spreads among the people and is transmitted to future generations. A poet who clothes adversity in poetic form immortalizes it in an everlasting monument.

Who will write of our troubles and who will immortalize them?

Poet of the people, were art thou?<sup>19</sup>

A possible answer was provided two and a half years later by the Warsaw resistance fighter, Mordecai Tenenbaum who hailed Yitzhak Katzenelson as the Bialik of his generation:

We furnished him with the debris of our misery, and he made it eternal, sang of it, it was our common property.<sup>20</sup>

Katzenelson's "Song of the Murdered Jewish People" is thus seen as the Holocaust equivalent of "Upon the Slaughter". However, there are also profound differences between the two. Only forty nine people were killed in the Kishinev pogrom; six million were exterminated during the Holocaust. The use of the term, "exterminated" highlights a further profound difference: the sporadic brutality of the Kishinev pogrom is far removed from the "unceremonious production of death" that took place during the Holocaust.<sup>21</sup> Lastly, Bialik wrote "In the City of Slaughter" after the event: he had not witnessed the pogrom at first hand. Katzenelson wrote "Song of the Murdered Jewish People" in Vittel, a transit camp for Auschwitz, where he later died. "Song of the Murdered Jewish People" is thus written during the Holocaust, about a fate that the poet knew he was soon to share:

No work before or since ever tried to encompass more: the loss of wife and children as an emblem of genocide; the premonitions of destruction that had gone unheeded; the abortive attempts to flee eastward when the war broke out; the Nazi terror in the first months of occupation; the German acts of sacrilege in every place inhabited by Jews; the internal life of the ghetto; the failure of Jewish politics; the role of the Jewish police and the Judenrat; the armed resistance; the Great Deportation ... the death of the children--"the first to go"; the gas chambers; the German people as the personification of evil; the uniqueness of the Holocaust.<sup>22</sup>

Katzenelson differs from Bialik in that he offers an account of the people's anguish during the Holocaust. He cannot offer a perspective on the event for those coming afterward--for the very reason that he did not survive.

Yet, in attempting to provide such a perspective, the survivor-writer is faced with an additional problem:

he writes in awareness of the extent of the Holocaust. The survivor writes with the knowledge that, even though defeated, Hitler succeeded in exterminating six million Jews, and effectively wiped out Eastern European Jewry:

The survivor is one who lives with the knowledge that the angel of wrath and evil has won an irrevocable victory during the Holocaust. The battlefield is strewn with six million corpses. Subsequent affirmations of the spirit,<sup>23</sup> human or divine, exist in the shadow of this fact.

Thus, a Wiesel lacks the innocence of a Chaim Kaplan. The latter could write that, although individuals would perish, the Jewish community would live on.<sup>24</sup> The survivor from Eastern Europe knows that their Jewish communities did not live on, or lived on in unrecognisable forms. The survivor-writer is thus haunted by images of the Nazis' success in destroying the Shtetl-culture of Eastern Europe. His writing is therefore bound by two conflicting claims: the need to acknowledge that this destruction has taken place, and the compulsion to commemorate and re-create the vanished communities. Thus, in Israel and the United States, there is a concerted attempt to resurrect Yiddish as a literary language. There is a need to re-create Yiddish precisely because of its status as "the embodied spirit of a dead people."<sup>25</sup> However, the success of this attempt can only ever be partial: the community that gave Yiddish literature its vitality no longer exists so Yiddish is no longer the predominant language spoken by one third of World Jewry.

Wiesel's writing is thus dominated by the acknowledgement of what has been lost and the futile attempt to re-create the Shtetl-culture of his childhood. He defines the uniqueness of the Holocaust in terms of the problem posed to the Jewish tradition by the utter annihilation of the victims:

This was an entirely new crime: an absolute crime. Absolute since the killers made the corpses disappear. For the first time in our history, the victims could not even be buried.<sup>26</sup>

However, it was not only the corpses that disappeared. In many cases, no trace was left of the Jewish communities. A

recurring theme in Wiesel's novels and essays is that of the Jews' return to their hometown, only to find that there is no trace of a Jewish community ever having lived there.<sup>27</sup> Writing thus serves two functions for Wiesel. First, it enables him to bear witness to "the scorched vestiges" of the passing of the Eastern European Jewish communities.<sup>28</sup> Second, writing becomes a means of commemorating those communities and individuals that vanished. In this respect, Wiesel's work supports Ezrahi's contention that writing becomes a substitute for the "elegies of properly mourned death":

the act of writing is for me often nothing more than the secret or conscious desire to carve words on a tombstone: to the memory of a town forever vanished, to the memory of a childhood in exile, to the memory of all those I loved and who, before I could tell them I loved them went away.<sup>29</sup>

The act of commemoration is not entirely negative: in commemorating the dead individuals and communities, the writer re-creates them. In doing so, he both keeps their memory alive and tries to rehumanize the victims. The Holocaust is symbolised by the figure of six million dead. This figure serves to render the victims anonymous, so that although the event is remembered, the individual victims become lost within the concept of mass atrocity. In commemoratively re-creating the victims, the writer strives to restore their individuality and to reverse the process of dehumanization central to life in the ghettos and deathcamps. Hence, Wiesel's apologia as a writer:

If I were to define my own role, my purpose and aspirations as a writer, they would be to try not to build but to rebuild a vanished universe; instead of creating characters and situations, I try to recreate them book by book, story by story, tale by tale--be they biblical, Talmudic, Hasidic, or modern. My goal is always the same: to bring back, at least for a while, some of the men and women the killers robbed of their lives and their names.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, many of Wiesel's characters are built upon individuals from his home town of Sighet, who are first described in *Night* and *Legends of Our Time*: every mystic in Wiesel's novels is a reflection of the original Moshe the Madman described in *Night*. Similarly, every *Shtetl* is

a reflection of Sighet. Wiesel's collections of Hasidic essays strive to relate the tales as he heard them from his grandfather, the Witzsnitzer hasid, Dodye Feig. In retelling the stories, he attempts to forge a link between the pre-Holocaust past and the post-Holocaust present:

My, father an enlightened spirit, believed in man.  
My, grandfather, a fervent Hasid, believed in God.  
The one taught me to speak, the other to sing.  
Both loved stories.  
And when I tell mine, I hear their voices.  
Whispering from beyond the silenced storm,  
they are what links the survivor to their memory.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the act of re-creation or re-telling offers a means of bridging the rupture generated by the Holocaust between past and present.

For Wiesel, the destruction of both the six million individuals and the Shtetl culture was an absolute injustice. Literature is employed as a weapon to combat the "absolute crime" of the Holocaust:

I believe the purpose of literature is to correct injustice. People were killed ... I try to bring them back to life or at least to bring their death back to life.<sup>32</sup>

In re-creating the town and characters of his childhood, Wiesel resurrects the innocence of his past and returns to a time when the Holocaust was not yet envisaged as a possibility. The act of re-creation is an abortive attempt to suspend history; to rescue the victims from their fate. However, in acknowledging that he can, at best, only bring the victims' "death back to life", he concedes that this act of re-creation is ultimately futile: in re-creating the victims, Wiesel also has to reenact their death once more.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the very act of re-creation serves to highlight further the rupture between the pre-Holocaust past and the post-Holocaust present. It only serves to highlight what has been lost. In describing this rupture, the narrator of *Twilight* effectively describes Wiesel's own literary strategy:

As a child, he imagined the future. Now, he reinvents the past. His reinvented past is sheltered

from disaster. The enemy never left his lair. The dead are not dead and God still inspires faith.<sup>34</sup>

However, Wiesel remains acutely conscious that this is a **reinvented** past; in reality, the dead remain dead and he is still striving to rekindle the faith of his childhood.

#### 5. 4. THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE:

The struggle to re-create the individuals and communities that perished during the Holocaust illustrates the limitations of language: the re-creation remains fictional and thus falls short of the intention of the writer. Thus, before he puts pen to paper, the Holocaust writer is aware that he will not, indeed cannot, fulfil his primary aim. A second aim is to give voice to the six million who died. Again the writer is doomed to fail: his very situation as a survivor gives him a different perspective to those who died. He can only give voice to the suffering of those who died through the exercise of imagination. Yet, how can he who survived imagine the thoughts of those who "touched bottom"?<sup>35</sup> Third, does language have the facilities to portray mass atrocity on the scale of the Holocaust? This question arose in connection with the mass slaughter of World War I. It applies even more in the context of the industrialised slaughter of six million civilians.<sup>36</sup>

If literature is understood as the re-creation of the individuals and communities that perished in the Holocaust, then the writer has to find a means of communicating "the silence left behind by millions of unknowns".<sup>37</sup> Yet, how is such silence to be decoded? Strictly speaking, it cannot be understood by the outsider, whether a survivor or one with no direct experience of the Holocaust. The survivor cannot comprehend the experience of the **Muselmann**, and the non-survivor cannot comprehend the experience of either survivors or victims. It is for this reason that Wiesel periodically suggests that silence is the most appropriate response to the Holocaust: it reflects both the silence of the victims and the incomprehensibility of the experience. However, Wiesel is also quick to acknowledge that a policy

of silence would be self-defeating: speech is essential if the experience of the Holocaust is to be communicated; to ~~remain~~ silent would be a betrayal of those victims who insisted upon testifying to their experience. He suggests that the use of language is inevitable, but that it is essential to recognise its limitations:

What else is there except language? It is the only tool given to us--communication....Nevertheless it is inadequate, and nevertheless we must do something with it ... hence the existential dilemma.<sup>38</sup>

Wiesel's response to this dilemma is to attempt to incorporate it within his fiction.

The conflicting claims of speech and silence dominate **The Oath**, where an entire community take a solemn oath to abdicate the role of witness: any survivors of the imminent pogrom are forbidden from testifying to the fate of the community.<sup>39</sup> However, the novel concludes with the sole survivor of the pogrom breaking his oath in order to save another's life: by handing on the role of witness, he provides another with the motivation to continue living.<sup>40</sup> Wiesel's fiction is also sprinkled with mute figures who serve to illustrate both the negative and positive implications of silence. Negative silence represents a refusal to communicate, and thus a refusal to acknowledge one's responsibility to others. **The Town Beyond the Wall** closes with the protagonist striving to communicate with a fellow prisoner, a catatonic youth. Positive silence is a mystical form of communication, following the tradition that silence is plenitude rather than absence. In this tradition, words are a lesser form of communication: what can be said is of less significance than that which is beyond words. An illustration of this is found in the ban on naming God: God is beyond words and thus cannot be named. **The Testament** symbolises the communicative role of silence by giving the role of witness to a mute. A third literary device employed by Wiesel to incorporate silence into his fiction is the use of dialogues with the dead. The dialogue partner can be a rhetorical device, as in the case of the three dialogues in **A Jew Today** between a



father and son, a mother and daughter, and a boy and his younger sister (the dialogues being easily identifiable as being between Wiesel and his father, his mother and younger sister, and himself and his sister).<sup>42</sup> An alternative is to have a character engage in conversation with the dead.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Wiesel strives to symbolise the silence of the dead within his usage of language.

One final caveat over the use of language centres upon the use of metaphor. The Holocaust writer faces a dilemma: is he justified in using metaphorical language when, in the Holocaust, the distinction between figurative and literal language was often blurred. There are two parts to this dilemma. First, the writer is haunted by the fact that, in the Holocaust, what had previously been a metaphor became reality. To illustrate this point, the literary critic, Alvin Rosenfeld cites two poems entitled "Smoke". The first, by Henry David Thoreau was written in the nineteenth century:

Light-winged Smoke, Icarian bird,  
Melting thy pinions in thy upward flight,  
Lark without song, and a messenger of dawn,  
Circling above the hamlets as thy nest;  
Or else, departing dream, and shadowy form  
Of midnight vision, gathering up thy skirts;  
By night star-veiling, and by day  
Darkening the light and blotting out the sun;  
Go thou my incense upward from this hearth,  
And ask the gods to pardon this clear flame.

The second poem is by the Yiddish poet, Jacob Glatstein, and bears witness to the literal realization of this metaphor in the Holocaust:

From the crematory flue  
A Jew aspires to the Holy One.  
And when the smoke of him is gone,  
His wife and children filter through.

Above us, in the height of sky,  
Saintly billows weep and wait.

God, wherever you may be,  
There all of us are also not.<sup>43</sup>

Having occurred once, the writer suspects that any future use of metaphor contains the seeds of its own realization: "figurative speech thus becomes haunted by the implicit threat of its actualization."<sup>44</sup>

The second part of the Holocaust writer's dilemma is a direct consequence of this blurring of figurative and literal language. The fragility of language is recognised: language no longer possesses the innocence that accompanied non-actualised metaphors. Even though he must continue to use language, because silence is the only alternative, the writer remains acutely conscious that the Nazis succeeded in subverting language by transforming metaphor into reality. This subversion also took another form: the Nazis succeeded in subverting Jewish covenantal language:

When the Chosen People became the people chosen, when "selection" replaced "election" as the key term to describe the future of a human being, we might have been forewarned of the fragility of a vocabulary of decent assurance when confronted by the murderous ambitions of indecent men.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the Holocaust writer of a religious background or persuasion is confronted by the subversion of his fundamental stock of images: the Nazis assumed the divine prerogative of choosing who would live and who would die. This subversion of religious vocabulary combines with the counter-testimony of the Holocaust to threaten to shatter the affirmation of faith. The writer is thus forced to reformulate his religious vocabulary in the light of the Holocaust. For the majority of writers, there is no alternative but to continue to employ covenantal metaphors: they have no other vocabulary available to express their anguish. However, they respond to the Holocaust by either reformulating or subverting these images.

##### 5. 5. REFORMULATING THE TRADITION:

Only today, after the whirlwind of fire and blood that was the Holocaust, do we grasp the full range

of implications of the murder of one man by his brother, the deeper meaning of a father's questions and disconcerting silences. Only as we tell them in the light of certain experiences of life and death, do we understand them.<sup>46</sup>

The Bible and covenantal faith provide Wiesel's basic vocabulary. In one sense, his work can be seen as a microcosm of the dialectic between promise and counter-testimony. However, Wiesel differs from the tradition in two ways. First, covenantal promise is located almost entirely in the past: it has to be re-created by the writer in the present. Second, Wiesel suspects that the Holocaust as counter-testimony is sufficient to shatter the covenantal framework irrevocably. As a result, the language of the Bible and the covenant has to be recovered: the gulf separating past and present has to be bridged. Wiesel adopts two complementary strategies in attempting to bridge this gulf. He highlights the way in which the Holocaust stands as counter-testimony to particular covenantal claims. Alternatively, Wiesel recovers the tradition by reformulating it in the light of the experience of the Holocaust: rather than interpreting the present in terms of the biblical past, the past is interpreted in the light of the post-Holocaust present.

All Wiesel's writing is dominated by a radical sense of rupture between the belief of his childhood and the doubt and questioning engendered by the Holocaust. He offers frequent nostalgic accounts of his pre-Holocaust faith, the most relevant being in the first essay in *A Jew Today*, "To be a Jew". Wiesel portrays the security that comes with an all-enveloping world-view. The covenant provides a paradigm for the religious life:

Once upon a time, in a distant town surrounded by mountains, there lived a small Jewish boy who believed himself capable of seeing good in evil, of discovering dawn within dusk and, in general, of deciphering the symbols, both visible and invisible, lavished upon him by destiny.

To him, all things seemed simple and miraculous: life and death, love and hatred. On one side were the righteous, on the other side the wicked....And

God in His Heaven kept accounts in a book only He could consult.<sup>47</sup>

The study of Torah, Talmud and Kabbalah provided the believer with the knowledge necessary to decipher the "visible and invisible symbols". In this passage, Wiesel connects covenantal faith with the straightforward theodicy of "for our sins we are punished": the world is divided into the righteous and the wicked. This theodicy is counter-balanced by his immersion in rabbinic theology, Lurianic Kabbalah, and the stories of the Hasidim which offered a more complex response to the problem of evil. Wiesel's pre-Holocaust faith combines the fervour of the Hasidim with a belief in a clearly ordered universe reflecting the nature of its Creator:

Yes, long ago in distant places it all seemed so simple to me, so real, so throbbing with truth. Like God, I looked at the world and found it good, fertile, full of meaning.<sup>48</sup>

However, the emphasis on the fact that he believed in this way "long ago", reflects Wiesel's conviction that such belief is no longer possible.

In both *Night* and "To be a Jew", Wiesel expresses his conviction that the Holocaust cannot be explained in terms of the covenantal framework. He rejects all the Orthodox responses to the Holocaust:

And the adolescent in me, yearning for faith, questioned: Where was God in all this? Was this another test, one more? Or a punishment? And if so, for what sins? What crimes were being punished? Was there a misdeed that deserved so many mass graves? Would it ever again be possible to speak of justice, of truth, of divine charity after the murder of one million Jewish children?<sup>49</sup>

Wiesel's inability to give a positive answer to these questions shatters his childhood faith: "The student of the Talmud, the child that I was, had been consumed by the flames."<sup>50</sup> However, unlike Rubenstein, he does not respond by rejecting covenantal faith. Wiesel's reaction is to strive to re-fuse the shattered fragments of his childhood faith, and to rediscover his pre-Holocaust fervour: "I still believe, but now chiefly in the hope

that faith will restore the old fervor."<sup>51</sup> Thus, Wiesel's fictional writing has increasingly been paralleled by a series of essays on biblical and hasidic figures, reflecting the desire to re-fuse the fragments of faith shattered during the Holocaust.<sup>52</sup>

Wiesel responds to the perceived shattering of the covenantal framework in two ways, one positive, one negative. The negative response is to continue to employ covenantal language, but to subvert it to highlight the depth of the rupture generated by the Holocaust. He emphasises the irony inherent in the Nazis displacing God as the arbiters of life and death: selection replaces election. Wiesel is tempted to conclude that this displacement disproves fundamental covenantal beliefs:

I believed, I was taught to believe, that man is good, that he is superior not only to the animals but also to the angels. What is our religion if not the exaltation of man, the basis for God's glory? Could I have been wrong?<sup>53</sup>

The memory of the **Muselmänner** tempts him to reply in the affirmative. The displacement of God by the Nazis is reflected in Wiesel's language. He employs biblical and liturgical images, but subverts both the context and meaning. Thus, the crematoria at Auschwitz are likened to a Hannukah lamp with six candles rather than the traditional seven: the seventh symbolises the day of rest which was negated at Auschwitz--both the crematoria and the inmates worked seven days a week.<sup>54</sup> The crematoria also inspire a subversion of the biblical image of the pillar of fire and the cloud of smoke. In the Exodus, God protects and leads the Israelites through the wilderness as a pillar of fire by night and a cloud of smoke by day. At Auschwitz, the pillar of fire, rather than symbolizing the divine presence, issues day and night from the crematoria. Similarly, rather than reflecting the divine presence, the cloud becomes a symbol of the ashes of the cremated Jews:

They took a people and turned them into flames and the flames, in turn, turned them into clouds....in Scripture the clouds were meant to protect the

Jews....But now they did not protect them. How could they? They **were** the clouds.<sup>55</sup>

The inadequacy of the covenantal framework to contain the experience of the Holocaust is illustrated by the subversion of traditional imagery.

A more positive response to the acknowledgement of this inadequacy is to reformulate the tradition in the light of the Holocaust. Thus, rather than formulating the Holocaust in the light of the tradition; the tradition is reformulated in the light of the Holocaust. Biblical characters and situations can only be fully understood in the light of the Holocaust: "some biblical metaphors become clear only when used within our own experience."<sup>56</sup> In the introduction to **Messengers of God**, Wiesel claims that his aim is

to reacquaint himself with the distant and haunting figures that moulded him....and eventually insert them into the present.<sup>57</sup>

However, rather than placing the biblical figures in the present, Wiesel inserts the experience of the Holocaust into the past. The biblical figures are redrawn in the light of the experience--particularly Wiesel's experience--of the Holocaust.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Cain's murder of Abel is the first genocide; Isaac: the first survivor; Jacob: the first child of a survivor. Wiesel's reformulation of the tradition is most apparent in his treatment of the **Akedah**--the Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22: 1-19); Job, and Jeremiah.

The **Akedah** stands as the traditional archetype for the test of faith: by demanding the sacrifice of Isaac, God presents Abraham with the supreme test. This test can be interpreted negatively or positively. In the positive reading, Isaac is shaken but alive and spends the years unaccounted for in the Bible in a Yeshiva. The negative reading is more predominant: the **Akedah** becomes the Jewish community's archetype for describing catastrophe. This negative reading depends on the biblical reference to Abraham descending alone from Mount Moriah (**Vayashav avraham el nearav**); the harmony of the journey and the ascent is broken. In interpreting the **Akedah** as the

archetype of catastrophe, the biblical story is often subverted: the sacrifice takes place. The negative reading of the **Akedah** renders it the most obvious archetype for attempting to understand the Holocaust. Thus, the poets Uri Zvi Greenberg, Amir Gilboa, and Jacob Glatstein all offer negative reworkings of the event.

Wiesel differs from traditional readings of the **Akedah** as the archetype of catastrophe in invoking the Holocaust in order to comprehend the full meaning of the biblical story. In reading the biblical text, he translates **le'olah--offering--**in the light of the greek **holokauston--Holocaust:**

Take your son and bring him to Me as an offering.  
The term used is **ola**, which means an offering that  
has been totally consumed, a holocaust.<sup>59</sup>

In employing the term "holocaust", Wiesel makes it impossible to read the text without hearing an echo of the the extermination of six million Jews. Such an allusion is only available to the Holocaust or post-Holocaust reader of the text, and is thus an example of eisegesis rather than exegesis. Such a textual reading reflects Wiesel's own existential situation: "When I think of Abraham, I think of a father and son during the Holocaust."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, it is possible to read **Night** as a reworking of the **Akedah**. The narrative is build around the testing of the relationship between father and son. The relationship between father and son depicted in the **Akedah** is subverted. Whereas, Abraham and Isaac ascend Mount Moriah in harmony, at Auschwitz, the son is advised to abandon his father in order to survive:

Don't forget that you're in a concentration camp.  
Here, every man has to fight for himself and not  
think of anyone else. Even of his father. Here,  
there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends.  
Everyone lives and dies for himself alone.<sup>61</sup>

**Night** charts the relationship of Wiesel and his father after their arrival in Auschwitz. This relationship is contextualised against a series of incidents concerning fathers and sons: Bela Katz who, as a member of the **Sonderkommando**, cremated his father's body; a son killing

his father for a piece of bread; and a son deliberately running on ahead and abandoning his father when he proved unable to keep up on the forced march from Auschwitz.<sup>62</sup> The last of these three episodes ends with the comment:

And in spite of myself, a prayer rose in my heart,  
to the God in whom I no longer believed.

My God, Lord of the Universe, give me strength  
never to do what Rabbi Eliahou's son has done.<sup>63</sup>

However, later on awakening to discover that his father has been taken away to the crematory during the night, Wiesel's response belies this prayer:

I did not weep, and it pained me that I could not weep. But I had no more tears. And, in the depths of my being, in the recesses of my weakened conscience, could I have searched it, I might perhaps have found something like--free at last!<sup>64</sup>

**Night** subverts even the negative reading of the **Akedah**. In the negative reading, Abraham returns from the mountain disillusioned and alone. In **Night**, Abraham dies and Isaac survives, but without any will to live, hence the reference to the protagonist looking like a corpse. Wiesel develops this analogy in his essay, "The Sacrifice of Isaac: A Survivor's Story", where Isaac also dies, and the altar itself is destroyed:

We have known Jews who, like Abraham, witnessed the death of their children; who like Isaac lived the **Akeda** in their flesh; and some who went mad when they saw their father disappear on the altar, with the altar, in a blazing fire whose flames reached into the highest of heavens.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, the use of the **Akedah** as an analogy for the Holocaust serves to highlight the rupture between past faith and the present. The memory of the Binding only serves to highlight the fact that the sacrifice was demanded by the Nazis and not by God, and there was no divine intervention to save the victims.

A second biblical archetype used in Holocaust Literature is that of Job. The Book of Job illustrates:

the eternal problem of immanent and transcendent justice on a human scale: Job, friend of man, tested by God, did not deserve his punishment.<sup>65</sup>



However, in Wiesel's reading, Job is both a positive and a negative archetype. He is a positive archetype because he symbolises humanity's right to contend with God over suffering. Job is also a negative archetype: he accepts God's "answer" from the depths of the whirlwind and is silent. In Wiesel's view, such acceptance is unjustified; the divine response fails to address Job's individual complaints:

God said nothing that Job could interpret as an answer or an explanation or a justification of his ordeals....He dealt in generalities, offering nothing but vast simplifications. Job's individual experience, his personal misfortunes mattered little; what mattered was the context, the overall picture....God spoke to Job of everything except that which concerned him; He denied him his right to individuality.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, although Berkovits employs Job as a paradigm for victims and survivors of the Holocaust, Wiesel rejects such a strategy. Job is an inappropriate model because of his failure to continue interrogating God. Hence, the criticism of Job in *The Town Beyond the Wall*:

That biblical rebel should never have given in. At the last moment he should have reared up, shaken a fist, and with a resounding bellow defied that transcendent, inhuman Justice in which suffering has no weight in the balance.<sup>67</sup>

In addition, Job is an inappropriate archetype for the victim or survivor interrogating God because the latter receive no answer, however inadequate, from out of the whirlwind.

Wiesel's preferred model for the Holocaust victim / survivor interrogating God is the prophet Jeremiah. The Prophet becomes the archetypal witness of catastrophe, who both sees and reports the event:

He is ... a survivor, a witness. Of all the prophets, he alone predicted the catastrophe, experienced it, and lived to tell the tale. He alone sounded the alarm before the fire, and after being singed by its flames went on to retell it to anyone who would listen.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, the portrait of Jeremiah is redrawn in the image of the survivor-witness. The destruction of the First Temple

is depicted in terms of a conflagration: the Prophet becomes the teller of tales "singed by its flames". Wiesel sees a further parallel in the response to Jeremiah. Jeremiah was either reviled or ignored by his contemporaries. Wiesel detects a parallel with those who escaped from the camps to warn communities still in the ghettos, but were disbelieved or ignored.<sup>69</sup> The Prophet can also stand as a model for the survivor-witness in this respect. Jeremiah continues to preach despite the hostility or lack of interest of his audience. He does so because of his integrity as a witness: the prophet speaks God's word, a function that is addressed to, but is not dependent on his audience. The function of spokesman for God provides a rationale for his life, and particularly for his survival when many of his contemporaries had perished:

He knows his voice will not carry, and yet: he yells, shouts, warns, pleads, prays. He has no choice: he must do something with his life. If he survives, it must be for a reason; he must do something with every minute--for every minute is a minute of grace.<sup>70</sup>

As with the Akedah, the portrait of Jeremiah is reformulated in the light of Wiesel's own experience. The above description is very similar to his explanations of why he feels compelled to continue to testify to the Holocaust. There is a striking similarity between the portrait of Jeremiah and one of Wiesel's favourite stories, offered as a rationale for continuing to bear witness despite a continually negative response:

One of the Just Men came to Sodom, determined to save its inhabitants from sin and punishment. Night and day he walked the streets and markets preaching against greed and theft, falsehood and indifference. In the beginning, people listened and smiled ironically. Then they stopped listening....

One day a child, moved by compassion for the unfortunate preacher, approached him with these words: "Poor stranger. You shout, you expend yourself body and soul; don't you see that it is hopeless?"

"Yes, I see," answered the Just Man.

"Then why do you go on?"

"I'll tell you why. In the beginning, I thought I could change man. Today, I know I cannot. If I still shout today, if I still scream, it is to prevent man from ultimately changing me."<sup>71</sup>

CONCLUSION:

I am a student of the ancient prophetic texts; every prophet had to be both a seer of pain and a consoler. I wish I had the power to console. I try, meaning I desperately seek hope. The emphasis is on desperate.<sup>72</sup>

The year spent in Auschwitz and Buchenwald proved the most fundamental experience of Wiesel's life, creating a rupture between life before and after. Writing is both a response to this rupture and an attempt to bridge it. Wiesel attempts both to give voice to the pain of the victims and survivors, and to find some positive means of coping with it: writing both commemorates what has been lost, and strives to find a language capable of communicating the survivor's experience.

The difficulties facing the writer are most apparent in Wiesel's assessment of literature as an act of commemoration and re-creation; and in his dialogue with the biblical archetypes of the covenantal tradition. Unlike Berkovits and Fackenheim, Wiesel is never tempted to bridge the rupture created by the Holocaust. He persistently maintains the tension between belief and unbelief. Indeed, he could be said to read the anguish of Holocaust survivors back into the biblical accounts. Thus, the *Akedah* gains an echo of the anguish of fathers seeing their sons die during the Holocaust. However, the treatment of biblical characters reflects the hopelessness of the attempt to re-create the communities and individuals wiped out by the Nazis. Rather than resurrecting individuals, literary re-creation only forces the writer to kill the victims a second time: the attempt to suspend or re-write history is ultimately doomed to failure. Similarly, Wiesel retells the biblical stories in the hope of finding an adequate religious response to the Holocaust. However, rather than finding this response, he feels compelled to retell the biblical

stories in such a manner that they foreshadow the Holocaust. Therefore, rather than standing as examples of faith in extremis, the Akedah and the story of Job appear as ominous warnings of the future for God's Chosen People. The biblical scholar, André Neher suggests that it is precisely the inevitable failure of this strategy that accounts for the power of Wiesel's work. As with the preaching of Jeremiah or the Just Man of Sodom, all his efforts meet with no response:

The tragic grandeur of Wiesel's work lies in this desperate effort to make the Bible, in the face of Auschwitz, say what it cannot say, because it said what it did when Auschwitz had not yet come into existence; and the painful emotions aroused by Elie Wiesel's ... books are largely due to this endeavor to place the words of the witness of Auschwitz within a Book which can finally only be silent.<sup>72</sup>

Wiesel's continuing dialogue with the Bible represents both a search for answers, and an attempt to recover the innocence of pre-Holocaust faith: the Bible belongs to a time when the Holocaust was not even envisaged and God both spoke to His people and inspired faith.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Lawrence Langer, **Versions of Survival**, 156-7.
2. Langer, **Versions of Survival**, 160.
3. Primo Levi, **If This Is A Man**, trans. Stuart Woolf, (1958), London: Penguin, 1979, 72.
4. Elie Wiesel, 'Art and Culture after the Holocaust', in ed. Eva Fleischner, **Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?**, New York: KTAV, 1977, 403-15, 403.
5. Many of the diaries and memoirs of <sup>victims</sup> were discovered after the war: the Ringelblum archives were buried in the rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto; many of the **Sonderkommando** diaries were buried among the ashes on the site of the crematoria at Auschwitz.
6. Ed. Irving Abrahamson, **Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel**, 3 Vols., New York: Holocaust Library, 1985, Vol. I, 113.
7. Elie Wiesel, 'Making No Become Yes', **New York Times**, 14. 4. 85.
8. Elie Wiesel, **One Generation After**, trans. Lily Edelman and Elie Wiesel, (1970), New York: Schocken Books, 1982, 78.
9. Harry James Cargas, **Harry James Cargas in Conversation with Elie Wiesel**, New York: Paulist Press, 1976, 86.
10. Elie Wiesel, **Night**, trans. Stella Rodway, (1958), London: Penguin, 1987, 126.
11. Elie Wiesel, **The Accident**, trans. Anne Borchardt, (1961), New York: Hill and Wang, 1985, 75.
12. Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi, **By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature**, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 118.
13. Elie Wiesel, **The Town Beyond the Wall**, trans. Stephen Becker, (1964), London: Robson Books, 1975, 153-79; Elie Wiesel, **The Gates of the Forest**, trans. Frances Frenaye, (1964), New York: Schocken Books, 1982, 189-226.
14. Wiesel acknowledges that the town of Szerencsevaros in **The Town Beyond the Wall** is based on Sighet; see 'The Last Return' in Elie Wiesel, **Legends of Our Time**, (1968), New York: Schocken Books, 1982, 110-130, 121-3. Wiesel recreates Sighet in a number of other essays: 'My Teachers', 'The Orphan' and 'An Evening Guest' in **Legends of Our Time**; 'Journey's Beginning', 'The Watch', and 'The Violin' in **One Generation After**; 'To Be a Jew', and 'Dodye Feig' in **A Jew Today**, trans. Marion Wiesel, (1978), New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
15. Wiesel, **Legends of Our Time**, 8.
16. Ezrahi, **By Words Alone**, 63.
17. Ibid. 100.
18. Yitzhak Katzenelson on the sixth anniversary of Bialik's death (1940), in David G. Roskies, **Against**

**the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture**, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1984, 211.

19. Chaim Kaplan, **The Warsaw Diary of Chaim Kaplan**, trans. and ed. Abraham I. Katsh, New York: Collier Books, 1973, 79, in Sidra Ezrahi, 'The Holocaust Writer and the Lamentation Tradition', in eds. Alvin H. Rosenfeld and Irving Greenberg, **Confronting the Holocaust**, 133-149, 139.
20. Ezrahi, **By Words Alone**, 107; Roskies, **Against the Apocalypse**, 211-2.
21. Ezrahi, **By Words Alone**, 63.
22. Roskies, **Against the Apocalypse**, 223.
23. Langer, **Versions of Survival**, 170.
24. Chaim Kaplan, **Scroll of Agony**, trans. and ed. Abraham Katsh, London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1966, entry for October 26, 1939, 39.
25. Ezrahi, **By Words Alone**, 97.
26. Elie Wiesel, **Twilight**, trans. Marion Wiesel, (1987), London: Viking, 1988, 173.
27. Jews returning to their home towns and finding no trace of their past forms a recurrent theme in Wiesel. See 'The Last Return', **Legends of Our Time**, 118-29; Elie Wiesel, **A Beggar in Jerusalem**, trans. Marion Wiesel, (1970), New York: Schocken Books, 1985, 22-9. The need to commemorate the lost communities is not only a predominant concern of literature. Israel's "Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance (Yad Vashem) Law, 5713--1953" specifically states that part of Yad Vashem's function is to commemorate: "the communities, synagogues, movements, and organizations, and the public, cultural, educational, religious, and benevolent institutions which were destroyed in the heinous attempt to erase the name and culture of Israel". 'The Valley of the Destroyed Communities' is currently under construction. The memorial to the victims of Treblinka incorporates a symbolic graveyard with 17, 000 jagged granite stones set in concrete. Several thousand of these stones bear the names of the Polish Jewish communities destroyed during the Holocaust. See James E. Young, **Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation**, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, 177.
28. Wiesel, **One Generation After**, 39.
29. Wiesel, **Legends of Our Time**, 10.
30. Elie Wiesel, 'A Personal Response', **Face to Face**, 1979, 6, 35-7, 36.
31. The dedication in Elie Wiesel, **Souls on Fire**.

32. 'Conversation with Lily Edelman', in ed. Harry James Cargas, **Responses to Elie Wiesel**, New York: Persea Books, 1978, 9-22, 10.
33. See 'My Teachers' in **Legends of Our Time**, 8-15.
34. Wiesel, **Twilight**, 215.
35. Levi, **If This Is a Man**, 33, 42-3; Primo Levi, **The Drowned and the Saved**, 63-4.
36. See Paul Fussell, **The Great War and Modern Memory**, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975; Lawrence Langer, **The Age of Atrocity: Death in Modern Literature**, Boston: Beacon, 1978.
37. Wiesel, **One Generation After**, 43.
38. Robert Franciosi and Brian Shaffer, 'An Interview with Elie Wiesel', **Comparative Literature**, 1987, 28: 3, 287-300, 296.
39. Elie Wiesel, **The Oath**, trans. Marion Wiesel, (1973), New York: Schocken Books, 1986, 241.
40. Ibid. 32-3, 54-5, 86-7, 282-3.
41. Wiesel, 'Dialogues' in **A Jew Today**, 167-80.
42. Elie Wiesel, **Dawn**, trans. Frances Frenaye, (1960), New York: Bantam Books, 1982.
43. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, 'The Problematics of Holocaust Literature', in eds. Rosenfeld and Greenberg, **Confronting the Holocaust**, 1-30, 17-8.
44. Young, **Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust**, 94.
45. Langer, **Versions of Survival**, 131.
46. Elie Wiesel, **Messengers of God**, xiii-iv.
47. Wiesel, 'To be a Jew', **A Jew Today**, 1-16, 1.
48. Ibid. 8.
49. Ibid. 11.
50. Wiesel, **Night**, 48.
51. Wiesel, **Legends of Our Time**, 62.
52. See Wiesel, **Messengers of God**; Elie Wiesel, **Five Biblical Portraits**, (1981), Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987; Elie Wiesel, **Four Hasidic Masters and Their Struggle Against Melancholy**; Elie Wiesel, **Souls on Fire / Somewhere a Master**, trans. Marion Wiesel, (1972 / 1982), London: Penguin, 1984.
53. Wiesel, **Twilight**, 111.
54. Cargas, **Harry James Cargas in Conversation with Elie Wiesel**, 55-6.
55. Ibid. 56.
56. Wiesel, **Five Biblical Portraits**, 125.
57. Wiesel, **Messengers of God**, x.

58. Young, **Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust**, 106-9.
59. Wiesel, **Messengers of God**, 71.
60. Cargas, **Harry James Cargas in Conversation with Elie Wiesel**, 107.
61. Wiesel, **Night**, 121-2.
62. Ibid. 46, 112-3, 103.
63. Ibid. 103.
64. Ibid. 123.
65. Wiesel, **Messengers of God**, 216.
66. Ibid. 231.
67. Wiesel, **The Town Beyond the Wall**, 52.
68. Wiesel, **Five Biblical Portraits**, 100-1.
69. Ibid. 123.
70. Ibid. 124.
71. Wiesel, **One Generation After**, 72.
72. André Neher, **The Exile of the word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz**, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981, 216.



6. THE TRIAL OF GOD: THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF ELIE WIESEL.

6. 1. INTRODUCTION.

6. 2. THE SILENCE OF GOD.

6. 3. THE DISPLACEMENT OF GOD.

6. 4. SINAI AND AUSCHWITZ.

6. 5. HUTZPA K'LAPEI SHAMAYA: BOLDNESS WITH REGARD TO  
HEAVEN.

6. 6. "WHAT IS THERE LEFT FOR US TO DO?".

6. 1. INTRODUCTION:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.<sup>1</sup>

The above passage from **Night** encapsulates the major elements of Wiesel's religious thought. The experience of the Holocaust generates an irreparable rupture between past and present. This rupture is caused by the belief that the death of six million Jews in the Holocaust represents an injustice--countenanced by God. God's silence in the face of the Holocaust renders this injustice absolute, thus generating the rupture.

Despite his assertion that the Holocaust generates an irreparable rupture, Wiesel refuses to follow a parallel course to Rubenstein and abandon the covenantal framework. His whole approach is dependent on the acceptance of the covenant: God's silence in the Holocaust is unacceptable precisely because He had promised to protect His Chosen People. The Holocaust is interpreted within the dialectic of promise and counter-testimony. However, does the Holocaust mark a further stage in the reinterpretation of

the covenant, or the point where promise dissolves under the pressure of the counter-testimony of history? Wiesel offers three, not necessarily exclusive, interpretations of the event. First, the Holocaust poses a greater threat than previous disasters: the ghettos and deathcamps formed a self-enclosed world in which the Nazis displaced God. Previous disasters were either limited in scope (local pogroms), or culminated in exile (the destruction of the First and Second Temple, the Expulsion from Spain). The aim of the Holocaust was the extermination of world Jewry. Thus, the apparent displacement of God during the Holocaust has greater repercussions for the Jewish understanding of God's presence in history: rather than being hidden, the divine presence has been supplanted or displaced. Second, in failing to fulfil His covenantal duty to protect His Chosen People, God has broken the covenant. Rather than accepting the traditional theodicy and identifying the Jews as the guilty party, Wiesel suggests that the Chosen People were innocent, whereas God was guilty of failing to fulfil His responsibilities. Third, the believer responds to the Holocaust by placing God on trial. The believer proclaims his innocence and indicts God for His silence during the Holocaust.

Wiesel's response to the Holocaust takes the form of an ongoing dialogue with the Jewish tradition. The "Trial of God" takes a similar form to his reformulation of the biblical stories. There can be no satisfactory answer found in the tradition, as it was formulated in times when the Holocaust was not a problem on the religious agenda. The tradition responds to the problem of evil, but does not envisage innocent suffering on the scale of the Holocaust. The past bore witness to analogous, but not identical catastrophes, and thus can only offer related, but not explicitly relevant responses. Wiesel responds by striving to locate an explicit foreshadowing of the religious problems posed by the Holocaust. However, this can only be achieved by reformulating the tradition in the light of the Holocaust.

6. 2. THE SILENCE OF GOD:

How does one answer the person who demands an interpretation of God's silence at the very moment when man--any man, Jew or non-Jew--has greater need than ever of His word, let alone His mercy?<sup>2</sup>

For Wiesel, the problem of the silence of God arises from his belief in the covenant and in divine omnipotence. It is because God is all-powerful, and had promised to protect His Chosen People, that His silence during the Holocaust is so problematic. Wiesel refuses to resolve the dilemma by relinquishing belief in God as Lord of History, or in the Jews' election as the Chosen People. God's "nocturnal silence" is incompatible with His promise to protect His Chosen People, and is thus sufficient to shatter faith.

Wiesel is adamant in rejecting any interpretation of God's silence that diminishes divine omnipotence. He follows the Hasidim in emphasising God's role as Creator and Master of the Universe, with responsibility to ensure the well being of His Chosen People. God intervened in the past to protect His people--at the Red Sea. The fact that He chose not to do so during the Holocaust serves to illustrate "the enigma of God's action in history."<sup>3</sup> The need to reinterpret the covenant in response to historical counter-testimony arises, in part, from this inconsistency of divine intervention. Berkovits' argument that the Parting of the Red Sea was a miracle--outside history--and thus does not set a precedent for subsequent divine intervention fails to resolve the dilemma: if such a miracle could occur once, it could occur again. However, Wiesel is not concerned with the logic of divine intervention in history; he is concerned with the justice of God's silence during the Holocaust. The Prophets present the relationship between God and Israel in terms of that between a husband and wife, or a father and son (Hos. 1: 2-20, 11: 1-9); but: "Would a father stand by quietly, silently, and watch his children being slaughtered?".<sup>4</sup> God's silence suggests that, "Either He dislikes His chosen people or He doesn't care about

them."<sup>5</sup> The dominant question throughout Wiesel's work is whether God's "nocturnal silence" is consistent with His love for His Chosen People.

This question dominates Wiesel's memoir, **Night**: "I did not deny God's existence, but I doubted His absolute justice."<sup>6</sup> **Night** charts the shattering, instantaneous impact of the Holocaust on his childhood faith:

I believed in man and even more in what transcended him. Then abruptly, all my ties were cut. Overnight, I was robbed of even the smallest point of reference or support, I was confronted with emptiness. Everywhere.<sup>7</sup>

Wiesel illustrates the rupture between past faith and the present by continuing to employ covenantal language, but subverting its content. Thus, he first questions the relevance of his childhood faith to his present situation on arrival at Auschwitz, when he refuses to say the **Kaddish**--the Jewish prayer for the dead, ("May His Name be blessed and magnified..."):

For the first time, I felt revolt rise up within me. Why should I bless His name? The Eternal, Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful and Terrible, was silent. What had I to thank Him for?<sup>8</sup>

In refusing to join in the **Kaddish**, he disassociates himself from "that solemn affirmation, filled with grandeur and serenity, by which man returns to God His crown and His scepter".<sup>9</sup> To say **Kaddish** in Auschwitz would be a "blasphemy": it would imply that the systematic, dehumanized slaughter of millions could be incorporated within the same liturgical framework of mourning as the death of an individual. For Wiesel, the recital of the **Kaddish** is a liturgical vehicle of continuity: a son says **Kaddish** annually on the anniversary of his father's death; to say **Kaddish** for himself or his father would be to imply that there is no difference between death in Auschwitz or Buchenwald, and that of previous generations. To say **Kaddish** in Auschwitz would be to deny the rupture generated between past and present:

The Holocaust defies reference, analogy. Between the death of my father and that of his, no comparison is possible. It would be inadequate, indeed unjust, to

imitate my father. I should have to invent other prayers, other acts.<sup>10</sup>

Wiesel's objections to the Kaddish--as an adequate liturgical response to the death of the Six Million--parallels the difficulties he faces in regarding writing as a "tombstone to the dead". Ultimately, both the Kaddish and a commemorative literary strategy are adopted, despite their inherent inability to fulfil their purpose, because there is no satisfactory alternative.

Liturgy's limited capacity in the face of God's silence during the Holocaust is reflected further in the context of camp services for Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. How can there be a meaningful celebration of New Year in Auschwitz, amid a constant struggle for survival? The service becomes "a mirage", where once it was central:

Once, I had believed profoundly that upon one solitary deed of mine, one solitary prayer, depended the salvation of the world.<sup>11</sup>

The reference in the past tense to Tikkun--the recovery of divine sparks--further serves to illustrate the rupture generated between past and present: in the context of Auschwitz, individual acts of piety no longer strike Wiesel as being of cosmic significance--what is the value of liberating a messiah who does not come in the face of such suffering?<sup>12</sup> His Rosh Hashanah prayer echoes the earlier Kaddish, in subverting covenantal language:

Blessed art Thou, Eternal, Master of the Universe, Who chose us from among the races to be tortured day and night, to see our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, end in the crematory? Praised be Thy Holy Name, Thou Who hast chosen us to be butchered on Thine altar?<sup>13</sup>

In Auschwitz, where selection has replaced election, there can be no reprieve.

The account of the Rosh Hashanah services follows the sole allusion to the divine presence suffering alongside the Chosen People in the Holocaust: the child-hanging scene. A scene that has attracted a wealth of comment. Wiesel describes the public hanging of two men and a child, accused of the sabotage of a power station at Buna:

The three victims mounted together on the chairs.

The three necks were placed at the same moment within the nooses.

'Long live liberty!' cried the two adults.

But the child was silent.

'Where is God? Where is He?' someone behind me asked.

At a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs tipped over.

Total silence throughout the camp. On the horizon the sun was setting.

'Bare your heads!' yelled the head of the camp. His voice was raucous. We were weeping.

'Cover your heads!'

Then the march past began. The two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues hung swollen, blue-tinged.

But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive....

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

'Where is God now?'

And I heard a voice within me answer him:

'Where is He? Here He is--He is hanging here on this gallows....'

That night the soup tasted of corpses.<sup>14</sup>

There have been numerous interpretations of this passage, both Jewish and Christian. On the Jewish side, it has been suggested that the passage is a parody of the crucifixion (NEHER)<sup>15</sup>; that God is powerless in the Holocaust (FACKENHEIM)<sup>16</sup>; or that God is continually dying, but is never dead (SHERWIN).<sup>17</sup> On the Christian side, the passage has been interpreted as an expression of a **theologia crucis** (MOLTMANN / BAUCKHAM).<sup>18</sup> Alternatively, the passage is seen as the supreme expression of Godforsakenness (ECKARDT)<sup>19</sup>; the death of the aspect of God that can be loved by humanity (ROTH)<sup>20</sup>; or the divine

embodiment of death and impotence in the face of evil (BROWN).<sup>21</sup>

In view of this gamut of interpretation, what is the author's own view? First, it is important to note the positioning of the text. The child-hanging scene is juxtaposed between an account of another hanging and the celebration of **Rosh Hashanah**. The first hanging scene parallels the second, except for the fact that the victim is an adult who dies proclaiming defiance. Rather than discussing the presence or absence of God, the conversation centres on whether the hanging will delay the evening's soup ration. The scene closes with Wiesel's comment: "I remember that I found the soup excellent that evening....".<sup>22</sup> The difference between the two scenes lies in the presence of a child: it is the agonising death of the child that inspires Wiesel to reply "Where is God? Here He is--He is hanging here on this gallows.". For Wiesel, "the death of a child is the death of innocence, the death of God in the heart of man."<sup>23</sup> His own childhood faith is shattered by the sight of "the little faces of children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.".

The child-hanging scene is immediately followed by Wiesel's subversion of traditional **Rosh Hashanah** prayers. These prayers, addressed to the "Eternal, Master of the Universe", do not suggest a concept of a powerless God (FACKENHEIM). For Wiesel, God's silence is a problem precisely because He is not powerless: He intervened in history in the past and could have done so again. Thus, of those interpretations offered, John Roth's suggestion seems closest to Wiesel's intention: belief in God's justice and love for His people is under threat. However, Roth is incorrect in suggesting that the aspect of God capable of being loved is dying. The love for God remains, as can be seen in Wiesel's portraits of the Hasidim. It is the worthiness of God to be a recipient of that love that is questioned: is a God who remains silent while children are burned alive, or take half an hour to die on the

gallows, worthy of His people's love? Thus, the child-hanging scene can be seen as a radical alternative to Berkovits' interpretation of "authentic" Judaism: is God worthy of the fervour and love of the Jews who died proclaiming His name.

To offer too strict an interpretation of the child-hanging scene is to misunderstand Wiesel's intention, both in this passage and in the whole of **Night**. The memoir constitutes an indictment of God's justice and love for His people. Such questions would never have occurred to Wiesel in Sighet, prior to deportation: the universe was ordered and reflected God's love for His Chosen People. The declamation in **Night** marks the shattering of these convictions. The determination never to forget God's "nocturnal silence" plants an irresolvable tension at the heart of Wiesel's faith. In **Night**, he continues to believe in God's existence, but radically questions divine justice. The questioning of God's justice and love for His people subverts the covenantal framework: the attributes of justice and compassion belong to the Chosen People; whereas God fails to fulfil His covenantal responsibilities. Thus, it is the Jews, qua upholders of the covenant, who judge God. **Night** marks the negative extreme of Wiesel's religious thought. In his subsequent work, he searches for a positive counter-balance to the silence of God during the Holocaust. The positive values of the covenant are gradually reclaimed, alongside the continued affirmation of the negative witness of the Holocaust.

#### 6. 3. THE DISPLACEMENT OF GOD:

my father gave back his soul at Buchenwald. A soul useless in that place, and one he seemed to want to give back. But, he gave it up, not to the God of his fathers, but rather to the imposter, cruel and insatiable, to the enemy God. They had killed his God, they had exchanged him for another.<sup>24</sup>

Wiesel draws two negative conclusions from the "nocturnal silence" portrayed in **Night**. First, the Holocaust bears witness to the displacement of God by the Nazis. Second, God's silence constitutes a failure to fulfil His



responsibilities, and thus marks the breakdown of the covenantal relationship.

The Nazis displaced God: they attained absolute power over the life and death of their victims. The ghettos and deathcamps formed a self-enclosed world, **l'univers concentrationnaire**. Within this world, the Nazis assumed the role of God. The divine election of the Chosen People was paralleled by the Nazis' selection of the Jews as the primary victims for extermination. The experience of this displacement shatters the believer's faith.

The absolute power of the Nazis over their victims is well documented. Selection replaced election--"the Biblical curses had become reality." (Deut. 28:15-68).<sup>25</sup> The **l'univers concentrationnaire** was a self-enclosed world with its own laws, the sole aim of which was the dehumanization and mass slaughter of its inmates. The sole authority in this world was that of the Nazis, who assumed the sovereign power of God:

in dealing with the victims, in an effort to break their morale before annihilating them, the executioners assumed the role of God. They alone could, by decree, proclaim the limits of good and evil. Their idiosyncrasies were law and so were their whims.<sup>26</sup>

The Nazis role as God was deliberately emphasised in the holding of selections on Yom Kippur--the Day of Atonement, and the timing of final assault on the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943 to coincide with the beginning of Passover.

The displacement of God has inevitable repercussions for covenantal understanding. In the face of the remorseless selection of the Nazis, the believer was confronted by the silence of God. This silence seemed incompatible with the covenantal promise of protection. Wiesel suggests that many continued to affirm the traditional theodicy of "for our sins we are punished", because it at least offered an explanation of their fate:

It was better to believe our punishment had meaning, that we deserved them; to believe in a cruel, but just God was better than not to believe at all.<sup>27</sup>

The believer who rejected this theodicy was confronted both by a meaningless fate, and a God acting in a manner inconsistent with covenantal expectations. Thus, belief no longer provides consolation, but rather serves to exacerbate the situation:

Everyday I was moving a little further from the God of my childhood. He had become a stranger to me; sometime, I even thought he was my enemy.<sup>28</sup>

A God who is omnipotent, but silent in the face of the Holocaust, cannot be concerned with the fate of His Chosen People. Such a God is "cruel and insatiable", rather than the father or husband envisaged by Hosea; the Nazis, rather than covenantal ethics, come to represent the image of God.

The Nazis assume the divine attribute of unchangeability, or consistency. God is presented in the tradition as being concerned with His people's fate. Yet such concern appeared to be lacking during the Holocaust.<sup>29</sup> This apparent lack of divine concern for the Jews qua Chosen People is reflected in the inconsistency of God's presence in history. The Nazis are the more consistent in their attitude to the Jews, and assume the unchanging character of God:

I've got more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He's the only one who's kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people.<sup>30</sup>

The believer is confronted with both God's failure to fulfil His covenantal promise to protect the Jews, and His continuing silence in the face of the Nazis' determination to fulfil their promise of utter annihilation. He is faced with the possible displacement of the Sinai covenant by that between the Nazis and the Jews; the crucial difference being that in the latter covenant the Jews are singled out for death rather than life.

Thus, the Holocaust is not only another world; it constitutes a negative **Heilsgeschichte**

Auschwitz, Majdanek, Treblinka. Belsen, Ponar, Sobibor. Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Chelmno: nocturnal capitals in a strange kingdom, a bewitched, immense and timeless kingdom. A biblical kingdom, where death as sovereign appropriated God's face as well

as his attributes in heaven and on earth and in the very heart of man.<sup>31</sup>

Covenantal faithfulness proves inadequate in the face of this appropriation of power: belief cannot alter the Nazi decree as to who shall live and who shall die. This appropriation of power continues even after the Holocaust. Covenantal faith proves incapable of incorporating the Holocaust within its traditional lamentational and liturgical framework. The **Kaddish** offers an inadequate vehicle for mourning the death of the Six Million. Can the negative memory of the Holocaust be incorporated within the positive framework of covenantal promise? There are occasions when Wiesel suggests that it cannot.

#### 6. 4. SINAI AND AUSCHWITZ:

Berkovits and Fackenheim claim that a religious response to the Holocaust must incorporate both belief and unbelief. In practice, both resolve this tension in favour of belief. Berkovits' concept of "authentic" Judaism inevitably excludes, or minimises, the loss of belief. Fackenheim's privileging of spiritual and armed resistance, as the basis of a partial **Tikkun**, again excludes the negative witness of those who "touched bottom". Despite emphatically defending the uniqueness of the Holocaust, Fackenheim refuses to grant the event the status of a root experience. The insistence that the Holocaust is the supreme epoch-making event is inconsistent with the claim that it generates an irreparable rupture between past and present. In Fackenheim's analysis, the Holocaust does not merely test and refine faith, it demands that it be re-created. Both Fackenheim and Berkovits fail to address seriously Rubenstein's claim that the Holocaust marks the the end of the covenant. Yet, in rejecting the covenant, Rubenstein ignores the dialectical nature of the tradition and its capacity to absorb and respond to historical counter-testimony. Of the four thinkers, Wiesel stands alone in acknowledging the logical consequences of the

Holocaust for belief within the context of the covenantal tradition.

Unlike Fackenheim, Wiesel is prepared to draw a parallel between the Holocaust and the Exodus. The Holocaust is both counter-testimony and anti-revelation: the event offers a potential alternative **Heilsgeschichte** to that of the covenant. For Wiesel, the Holocaust is the "most important event in Jewish history and human history, with the possible exception of the Revelation at Sinai".<sup>32</sup> There are two occasions when Wiesel considers the potential repercussions of this statement: the possibility that the anti-revelation of the Holocaust cancels out the revelation of Sinai. He first addresses the issue in the symposium, 'Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future' (1967); and then again in *A Beggar in Jerusalem* (1970).

In 'Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future', Wiesel suggests that the covenant was broken during the Holocaust. He develops this suggestion by reference to a Midrash contrasting the festivals of **Hanukka** and **Purim**: on the first occasion, the Jews employed military means to defend themselves against a spiritual threat; on the second, they employed spiritual means to defend themselves against a physical threat. The two responses serve to illustrate the covenantal relationship:

The Jewish people entered into a covenant with God. We are to protect His Torah, and He, in turn, assumes responsibility for Israel's presence in the world. Thus, when our spirituality--the Torah--was in danger, we used force in protecting it; but when our physical existence was threatened, we simply reminded God of His duties and promises deriving from the covenant.

Well, it seems that, for the first time in our history, this very covenant was broken. That is why the Holocaust has terrifying theological implications.<sup>33</sup>

God's silence during the Holocaust is interpreted as the failure to fulfil His covenantal responsibility to protect His Chosen People.

Wiesel's argument runs counter to that of Isaac Nissenbaum. The latter argued that **Kiddush ha-hayyim**, the sanctification of life, was the appropriate response to a physical threat to Jewish survival: the Jew protected that which the enemy wished to take from him. Wiesel's argument is closer to that of Eliezer Berkovits. He echoes the latter's claim that **emunah**-- trust / steadfast faith-- and **kiddush haShem** form the appropriate response to threats to Jewish survival. However, the two differ in the interpretation given to the reason for such trust. Wiesel argues that God had promised to protect His people, if they fulfilled their role as witnesses to the divine presence in history. Berkovits differs in arguing that divine intervention in history cannot be regarded as a norm. The divine presence in history is hidden. **Emunah** is the believer's trust in God despite the counter-testimony of history. Wiesel is emphatic that such trust is dependent on God's covenantal promises to protect His people.

Therefore, despite the apparent similarity between Berkovits and Wiesel, their conclusions differ radically. Berkovits rejects the notion that the Holocaust is unique, arguing that the "authentic" Judaism of the ghettos and deathcamps, and the establishment of the <sup>State of</sup> Israel in 1948, are proof of the continuing validity of the covenant. Indeed, the return to **Eretz Israel** is a messianic, and thus miraculous, divine intervention in history; and as such, is an event of promise that serves as a positive counter-balance to the Holocaust. For Wiesel, the Holocaust marks God's failure to fulfil His covenantal responsibility to protect His people, and as such, is "the first time in our history this very covenant was broken."

In suggesting that the covenant is broken, Wiesel employs similar language to Richard Rubenstein. However, he differs in considering the repercussions of a broken covenant within the covenantal framework. In granting the Holocaust the status of a root experience, he incorporates the loss of belief or **emunah** experienced by both victims

and survivors within the covenantal framework. Michael Berenbaum suggests that Wiesel's post-Holocaust vision is that of the void. The Midrashic framework is in danger of collapse: to talk of God's presence, or the covenantal relationship, is so problematic in view of the divine silence at Auschwitz that the temptation is to follow Rubenstein in rejecting the covenantal framework. Wiesel's response to the void is to posit an additional covenant: God can no longer be relied upon as a covenantal partner, but Israel renews its mission of **Tikkun** in spite of the void.<sup>34</sup> However, is this interpretation valid? The void, understood as the loss of fervour in response to God's silence at Auschwitz, is a dominant motif in Wiesel's work. However, this motif gains its force from the constant evocation of the covenantal framework, as symbolised by Wiesel's childhood in Sighet. Wiesel's religious thought can be seen as an attempt to restore the covenant broken at Auschwitz, thus recovering the lost fervour. It would be more consistent with the rest of Wiesel's work to interpret the breaking of the covenant in terms of the believer's loss of **emunah**--absolute trust--in God's faithfulness toward His people.

Wiesel refers again to the breaking of the covenant in his novel, **A Beggar in Jerusalem** (1970). However, less explicit language is employed: the Torah is "taken back". Written in the aftermath of the Six Day War (1967) and the retaking of the Old City, the novel considers the possibility that the State of Israel offers a messianic "answer" to the Holocaust. The passage we are concerned with contains a visionary account of the convergence of Jews on the Western wall, after the retaking of the Old city:

Men, women and adolescents of every age, every origin and speaking every language, and I see them ascending toward the Wall, toward all that remains of their collective longing. Just like long ago, at Sinai, when they were given the Torah. Just like a generation ago, in the kingdom of night, when it was taken back. Once again the exiles are being gathered in, the knot is being knotted--the end is rejoining the beginning and justifying it.<sup>36</sup>

There have been two interpretations of this passage--one Christian, one Jewish. The Christian theologian, Roy Eckardt suggests that Wiesel is referring to the "recantation of the covenant". The covenant was rescinded by God, either as a punishment for sin--an interpretation Eckardt rejects; or in acknowledgement of His own failure to fulfil His covenantal responsibilities. If the second alternative is adopted, then the covenant is no longer binding on the Jews, and God can only show penitence for His failure to protect His people. This interpretation is inconsistent with Wiesel's thought in one crucial respect: Wiesel's perspective is that of the believer after the Holocaust. His concern is with the breakdown of *emunah*, as a consequence of God's silence during the Holocaust. The Torah was "given" and "taken back". The use of the passive voice suggests that the perspective is that of the Jews, rather than that of God. Wiesel's concern is with the human response to God's failure to fulfil His promise to protect His people. Eckardt reverses this perspective: the focus is on God's response to this failure; a position Wiesel explicitly refuses to adopt.<sup>36</sup>

Michael Berenbaum offers a very different analysis of the passage ... He suggests that Wiesel's intention is to offer a literary, even symbolic, account of the retaking of the Old City; an account that interprets the event as Israel's confrontation with her historical past--as symbolised by the Western Wall. The Wall symbolises the Jews' "collective longing". As all that remains of the Second Temple, the Western Wall has come to symbolise both historical catastrophe and exile. The retaking of the Old City has messianic overtones: it marks the end of exile. In addition, the Wall symbolises the Jews' unfulfilled messianic hopes: in some traditions, the Messiah first appears at the Wall. In the light of this reading, the retaking of the Old City is interpreted as a confrontation with the memory of the divine presence (located in the Holy of Holies, and accessible through the cult), and lost religious fervour. The memory of the divine presence (symbolised by Sinai and the Temple)

confronts the counter-testimony of the Holocaust. The Return to the Old City suggests the possibility that the gulf between the two can be bridged; that an affirmation of covenantal faith might again prove possible. Such an interpretation is consistent with the understanding of the breaking of the covenant in terms of the loss of **emunah**.

However, can the Return to the Old City signify a restoration of **emunah**? In this passage, Wiesel appears to suggest the possibility that the shattered fragments of faith might be re-fused: "the end is rejoining the beginning and justifying it." Should this remark be taken as acceptance of Berkovits' suggestion that the Return is an event of messianic promise, and as such counter-balances the negative testimony of the Holocaust? Wiesel acknowledges the messianic dimension of the Return. However, **A Beggar in Jerusalem** is the only instance when he alludes to the possibility that the State of Israel bridges the rupture generated by the Holocaust. The suggestion of completion or wholeness implicit in this passage is rejected in the novel's closing pages:

Victory does not prevent suffering from having existed, nor death from having taken its toll....Of course, the mystery of good is no less disturbing than the mystery of evil. But one does not cancel out the other.<sup>37</sup>

The positive testimony of the Return to the Old City does not cancel out the negative counter-testimony of the Holocaust; the two co-exist. In rejecting the covenant, Rubenstein ignores the positive testimony of Sinai and the Return. If negative evidence is allowed to count against the covenant, then positive testimony is also admissible. The retaking of Jerusalem offers a counter-balance to despair, without cancelling out the negative witness of the Holocaust.

A further analogy serves to highlight Wiesel's understanding of the relationship between Sinai and the Holocaust:

The story I try to tell is, first of all, a story of night which the **kabbalah** calls **shvirat hakelim**--the



breaking of the vessels--that something happened at the origin of creation, a cosmic cataclysm.

Our story is of the same nature. Something happened a generation ago, to the world, to man. Something happened to God. Certainly, <sup>so much</sup> happened to the relations between man and God, man and man, man and himself.<sup>38</sup>

In utilizing the analogies of Sinai and the Breaking of the Vessels, Wiesel strives to express the effect of the Holocaust on "the relations between man and God, man and man, man and himself."; in doing so, he employs the frame of reference that ordered these relationships prior to the Holocaust. The impact of Auschwitz is expressed in terms of the faith that has been shattered. Thus, Luria's image of cosmic evil is employed as an analogy for the apparent displacement of God by the Nazis. The challenge posed to belief by the perverse parallels between election and selection is conveyed by means of an analogy between Sinai and the Holocaust. Wiesel employs the seminal vocabulary of the Jewish tradition to provide an analogy, not an equation with the Holocaust: "Our story is of the same nature". The nature of these analogies reflects the continuity between Wiesel and the tradition: he continues to express himself in covenantal language, even though **emunah** is no longer a part of the relationship between humanity and God. The retention of covenantal language is significant. Even if broken, the covenant relationship is essential to Wiesel: it provides the criteria for criticising God's silence during the Holocaust. It is only possible to talk of the covenant being broken from within the covenantal framework: the covenant informs both God's expectations of humanity, and humanity's expectations of God.

Thus, Wiesel differs from Rubenstein in his understanding of the religious problem posed by the Holocaust. Rubenstein, confronted by the Holocaust, perceives a stark alternative--between the affirmation that the Holocaust was a divine punishment for sin, and the rejection of the covenant. Either the Chosen People were guilty of sin and deserved to be punished, or there

is no covenant and no election. Wiesel differs in refusing to see the dilemma posed by the Holocaust in terms of an alternative. The dilemma facing the believer is created by the expectation, on the basis of covenant faith, that God will intervene in history to protect His Chosen People, and the divine failure to meet this expectation. For Wiesel, God's silence during the Holocaust is a problem precisely because of the covenantal framework. Thus, the dominant theme in Wiesel's work is the believer's loss of **emunah** in response to God's silence. The covenant remains the governing framework of belief, but the vital ingredient of trust is absent. After the Holocaust, the relationship between the Chosen People and God is one where the former interrogate, rather than trust, the latter. The believer questions both God and the tradition, in the hope that answers will be forthcoming that will allow the relationship of **emunah** to be re-established-- that God will act in the manner expected of Him on the basis of the covenantal relationship with His Chosen People.

6. 5. HUTZPA K'LAPEI SHAMAYA: BOLDNESS WITH REGARD TO HEAVEN.

we must ... recognise the possibility and indeed the necessity of turning against God--the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob--and remember that so many Abrahams, so many Jacobs, and so many Isaacs were not saved on the altar. There was no angel to come and save them. I do not know the reason and I do not know the answer.<sup>39</sup>

Contention with God--the individual's demand for justice--is a long standing, albeit minority tradition within Judaism, and represents one response to the problem of evil. This tradition often takes the form of a trial. The believer indicts God for His failure to fulfil His covenantal promise to protect His people. Byron Sherwin suggests that God is a "person" in Jewish law: He is a party to an agreement, and as such can be tried for breaking that agreement.<sup>39</sup> The covenant is binding on both parties. God can judge human beings if they sin, and humanity can judge God if He fails to fulfil His

responsibilities. As the initiator of the covenant, more seriousness is attached to God's failure. In challenging God, Wiesel stands within the tradition of contention with God. However, the radical counter-testimony of the Holocaust also sets him apart from previous examples of contention: the covenantal framework is shattered and the relationship of **emunah** between humanity and God is lost.

**Hutzpa K'lapei Shamaya**, boldness with regard to Heaven, forms a consistent thread throughout the Jewish tradition. The biblical tradition of contention begins with Abraham protesting against the decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah:

"Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of the earth do right?" And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." (Gen. 18: 16-33)

The Prophets protest in similar fashion over the fate of the innocent. Moses protests on behalf of both the innocent and the guilty, persuading God to rescind His judgement against the Israelites for the creation of the Golden Calf (Ex. 32: 7-14). One midrash comments:

God says, "I rule mankind. Who rules Me?--The righteous. For I make a decree and they annul it."<sup>40</sup>

The school of Rabbi Ishmael suggests that contention with God is justified in the face of God's silence:

"Who is like unto Thee among the mighty (**elim**) O Lord?" (Ex. 15: 11). Said Rabbi Ishmael: Read rather "Who is like unto Thee among the silent (**elmim**), O Lord--seeing the suffering of His children and remaining silent?"<sup>41</sup>

In contending with God, the believer hopes that, like Job, he will receive an answer; that God will no longer remain silent in the face of innocent suffering.

Contention with God formed a central part of early Hasidism. Part of the **Zaddik's** function was to intercede

with God on behalf of his community. He implored or demanded that God intervene in history to prevent His Chosen People suffering further. Hasidism concentrated on the morality of God's continuing silence in the face of His people's suffering. The most extreme exponent of **Hutzpa K'lapei Shamaya** was the Hasidic Master, Levi-Yitzhak of Berditchev (1740-1809). The continued suffering of the Jews provides sufficient "evidence" for Levi-Yitzhak to find God guilty of failing to fulfil His covenantal function. Thus, rather than talking of **Yom Kippur** (singular), he refers to **Yom Ha-kippurim** (plural)--a day of atonement for both God and humanity.<sup>42</sup>

Wiesel explicitly associates himself with Levi-Yitzhak of Berditchev by adopting the latter's definition of contention as his own:

Jewish tradition allows man to say anything to God, provided it be on behalf of man....It all depends on where the rebel chooses to stand. From inside his community, he may say anything. Let him step outside it, and he will be denied this right. The revolt of the believer is not that of the renegade; the two do not speak in the name of the same anguish.<sup>43</sup>

Levi-Yitzhak's definition of contention serves to explain the hostile reaction to Rubenstein's work: he is seen as a "renegade", as one who steps outside his community. By contrast, Wiesel is a "rebel", but one who speaks from "inside his community". He agrees with Levi-Yitzhak that contention is a characteristic of the Jewish tradition; a characteristic that gains its legitimacy from its position inside the covenantal framework:

man must interrogate God, as did Abraham; articulate his anger, as did Moses; shout his sorrow, as did Job. But only the Jew opts for Abraham--who questions--and for God--who is questioned.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, contention is an expression of faith: the believer articulates his anger or disappointment at God's failure to act in the manner expected of Him.

Although Wiesel adopts Levi-Yitzhak's definition of contention as his own, there are also striking differences between their two positions. Wiesel differs in making contention--the Trial of God--the dominant motif in his

religious thought. In the light of the believer's loss of **emunah**, contention becomes the only meaningful expression of faith:

only those who do not believe in God will not cry out to him in wrath and anguish.<sup>45</sup>

The Trial of God that runs throughout Wiesel's work has its roots in an incident witnessed in Auschwitz:

inside the kingdom of night, I witnessed a strange trial. Three rabbis--all erudite and pious men--decided one winter's evening to indict God for allowing his children to be massacred.<sup>46</sup>

This trial is imposed retroactively on the tradition. Thus, the question posed by the **Akedah** incorporates that posed by the death of the Six Million; Job's failure to persist in questioning God is all the greater in the light of subsequent Jewish suffering; Jeremiah's anguish at the Fall of Jerusalem incorporates that of the survivor-writer after the Holocaust. The questioning of the Hasidic Masters gains an added sense of urgency: the struggle against melancholy is as much Wiesel's as it is theirs.

Wiesel differs from Levi-Yitzhak's definition of contention in one further crucial respect--his identification of legitimate contention. He radically redefines the identities of the "rebel" and the "renegade". Wiesel acknowledges the common ground between the post-Holocaust Trial of God and the metaphysical "rebellion" of an Ivan Karamazov or an Albert Camus.<sup>47</sup> Such agnostic or atheistic rebellion reflects similar moral outrage and humanitarian concern, even though the framework of the protest differs. Thus, rather than differentiating between those who are "inside" the community and those "outside", Wiesel distinguishes between those protests that are "on behalf of man" and those that are not. The authenticity of contention can no longer be judged on a purely religious basis: there is a protest that transcends the boundaries between belief and unbelief:

He who says today that he is at peace with himself and with God is estranged from both. Today, the

angry believer, and perhaps the angry non-believer may be called the true believers.<sup>48</sup>

Rather than following Berkovits and Fackenheim in privileging the "authentic" belief of the Hasidim and Orthodox Jews in the ghettos and deathcamps, Wiesel strives to incorporate both belief and unbelief into his response to the Holocaust. Both constitute equally legitimate reactions to the injustice of the event, and neither should be privileged at the expense of the other. In attempting to maintain the legitimacy of both belief and unbelief, Wiesel suggests that a religious response to the Holocaust should inhabit the borderlands between the two. The protest atheism of Albert Camus and Ivan Karamazov inhabits a similar borderland area to the believer contending with God: a protest is registered against the injustice of innocent suffering.

The "angry believer" and the "angry non-believer" share a refusal to accept answers or resolutions of the problem of innocent suffering.<sup>49</sup> Wiesel is adamant that there can be no answer to the problem posed by God's silence during the Holocaust. God could have intervened during the Holocaust, but failed to do so; a failure that cannot be rectified in the messianic future. God remains omnipotent, but is bound by His chosen course of action. Having elected to remain silent during the Holocaust, God can do nothing to minimise subsequently the injustice of that silence:

God himself cannot change the past; even he cannot negate the fact that the killer has killed six million times. How could he redeem himself. I do not know. I suppose that he cannot.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, neither God nor the writer can re-create the lives of the individuals and communities that were wiped out during the Holocaust--the memory of injustice remains. As a consequence, there can be no resolution to the Trial of God: the injustice of the Holocaust cannot be redeemed, yet the believer continues to hope for the restoration of **emunah** to the covenantal relationship. The fact that contention continues serves to emphasise the believer's

commitment to covenantal ethics, even though the element of trust in the relationship has been shattered. The Jews assume God's role as the unchanging, consistent partner in the covenant; whereas God is presented as fickle in His commitment to His Chosen People:

In the endless engagement with God, we proved that we are more patient than He, more compassionate, too. In other words, we did not give up on Him....For this is the essence of being Jewish: never to give up--never to yield to despair.<sup>51</sup>

To give up on the covenant would be to break with the positive values of the past.

Wiesel's definition of the essence of Judaism as a refusal to yield to despair should not be confused with Fackenheim's 614th Commandment, with its prohibition against despair. Wiesel interprets Judaism as an "endless engagement with God". Rather than accepting that historical counter-testimony marks the end of the covenant, the Jews consistently reinterpret the tradition in the light of catastrophe. The reinterpretation of covenantal faith is inspired by a refusal to accept that historical catastrophe is justified. Within the broad dialectic of covenantal promise and historical counter-testimony, the individual continues to protest his innocence. In the Bible, the demand for justice is both on behalf of the community (Abraham, Moses), and on behalf of the individual (Job). Thus, a religious response to the Holocaust has to be both a communal and an individual one. The establishment of Yom HaShoah, the Holocaust Remembrance Day, bears witness to the community's desire to remember the injustice of the Holocaust. The Trial of God serves to give expression to the individual's sense of outrage. After each catastrophe, there was the temptation to yield to despair and acknowledge that historical counter-testimony had rendered continued covenantal faith impossible. Refusing to yield to despair constituted an affirmation of the positive content of that faith. The response to catastrophe was thus to reinterpret the tradition in a way that was meaningful in the aftermath of disaster. The refusal to yield to despair was never an

end in itself. Wiesel's opposition to despair co-exists with the recognition that it constitutes a valid response to the silence of God in the face of the Holocaust. Thus, the rejection of despair should be interpreted as an intrinsically illogical affirmation of hope, based on the positive values of covenantal faith and the memory of the fervour generated by the relationship of **emunah** that once existed between God and His Chosen People.

6. 6. "WHAT IS THERE LEFT FOR US TO DO?":

So be it! ... He's guilty; do you think I don't know it? That I have no eyes to see, no ears to hear? ... Yes, He is guilty. He has become the ally of evil, of death, of murder, but the problem is still not solved. I ask you a question and dare you to answer: 'What is there left for us to do?'<sup>52</sup>

The bulk of Wiesel's work is concerned with how the memory of God's silence, and the subsequent loss of **emunah** in the covenantal relationship, is to be absorbed into post-Holocaust existence. All the protagonists in his novels struggle to resolve the tension generated between the positive qualities of covenantal faith and the injustice of God's silence during the Holocaust. Wiesel differs from Rubenstein, Berkovits and Fackenheim<sup>in</sup> refusing to resolve the tension between promise and counter-testimony: to do so would be to privilege either those who lost faith or those who continued to have faith during the Holocaust. In rejecting the covenant, Rubenstein disassociates himself from the Jewish past, and implicitly minimises the faith of those who continued to believe, both before and during the Holocaust. In reaffirming the covenant, Berkovits and Fackenheim implicitly privilege faith over unbelief or the loss of faith. In focussing upon armed and spiritual resistance, both thinkers unintentionally minimise the negative testimony of the **muselmänner**, those who "touched bottom". Wiesel strives to articulate a response that incorporates both negative and positive witnesses to the Holocaust, while privileging neither.

Wiesel's response is less grandiose in its conception than that of Rubenstein, Berkovits, or Fackenheim. Although his work is dominated by the problems facing the



believer confronted by God's silence, he does not attempt to articulate a post-Holocaust philosophy or theology. Wiesel does not claim to possess the authority to define the nature of "faith after the Holocaust", either in terms of "covenantless" or "authentic" Judaism. As a result of his personal experience of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, he is reluctant to theorise over which reaction constitutes the "authentic" response. When he speaks of faith after the Holocaust it is on an intensely personal level; a fact that partly accounts for his greater popularity. Through his novels and essays, he shares a personal quest for a meaningful faith, that neither denies the injustice of God's silence during the Holocaust, nor minimises the positive heritage of the tradition.

Wiesel emphatically refuses to reject traditional covenantal faith, despite the failure of God's failure to fulfil His covenantal promise to protect His people. This refusal has to be understood within the context of the belief that "the essence of Jewish history is mystical and not rational."<sup>53</sup> Wiesel is adamant that "a Jew is never alone": he is "surrounded, if not shielded, by his community, both physically and spiritually."<sup>54</sup> There, are two levels to this "mystical" understanding of history. The Jew exists as an individual, but within the context of his community. He has a responsibility both to himself and the community that moulded him. As a survivor and writer, Wiesel has the responsibility of bearing witness to the loss of his home town, Sighet, and to the teachers who had a profound influence upon his Jewish self-understanding.<sup>55</sup> The solidarity between the individual and his community reflects that between the individual and the historic Jewish community:

Man is not alone....God makes us remember the past so as to break our solitude. Our forefathers stand behind us, some of them tested or chosen by God. Whatever they did, they did for us. Whatever we do, we do for them.<sup>56</sup>

The individual Jew is a representative of the covenantal community; a community that incorporates both those who affirmed their faith in the face of suffering

(Rabbi Akiba), and those who repudiated faith in response to catastrophe (Elisha ben Abuya). In refusing to privilege either faith or unbelief as an appropriate response to the Holocaust, Wiesel remains consistent with this "mystical" reading of Jewish history: the post-Holocaust Jew stands as a representative of both the faith and unbelief of the past, and the faith and unbelief generated during the Holocaust.

However, in spite of this mystical solidarity, Wiesel acknowledges that the Holocaust did generate a rupture between past and present: the tradition no longer means what it once did; it has to be recovered and reformulated. In the light of this acknowledgement, is it not more logical to follow Rubenstein in asserting that the covenant no longer forms a meaningful vehicle for religious belief? Wiesel demurs: although the covenant is broken--in the sense that the element of **emunah** is no longer part of the covenantal relationship--the tradition still provides a meaningful way of responding to catastrophe. The interpretation of the covenant as a dialectic between promise and counter-testimony provides analogies for responding to the Holocaust. The rabbinic response to the disasters of 70 and 135, and that of Isaac Luria to the Expulsion from Spain, offer precedents for the further reinterpretation of the covenant after the Holocaust. However, such precedents serve to highlight both the continuity and the discontinuity between the Holocaust and previous catastrophes. Does the Holocaust mark a further stage in the reinterpretation of the tradition, or the point at which the covenant finally collapses under the weight of historical counter-testimony? Wiesel responds by arguing that, although humanity's trust that God will fulfil His covenantal responsibilities is shattered, the human commitment to covenantal ethics remains. The tradition is reformulated in the light of this loss of **emunah**, and serves as both a reminder of past closeness in the covenantal relationship, and a basis for responding to catastrophe in the present:

Traditions no longer mean what they once did. Nevertheless, they are significant in allowing a person to face his fate. They allow one to reappropriate the past.<sup>57</sup>

Wiesel's Biblical and Hasidic essays can be interpreted as an attempt to relate the anguish of the believer in the present to that expressed in the tradition. He then strives to apply traditional responses to innocent suffering to the present.

Wiesel builds his response to the Holocaust around the traditional concept of contention with God. However, he is adamant that this cannot be regarded as an end in itself. Contention with God is only valid if it is located within a concern for others: Abraham protested over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah; Moses and Levi-Yitzhak of Berditchev contended with God over the fate of the Chosen People as a whole. The lesson of the book of Job is that "it is given to man to transform divine justice into human justice and compassion".<sup>58</sup> Contention is only a valid response to God's silence if protest finds practical expression in "human justice and compassion". Wiesel contextualises contention within an understanding of **Tikkun**. The need for **Tikkun** is all the greater after the Holocaust, in the light of both God's silence and humanity's abandonment of the victims to their fate. The responsibility for **Tikkun** is entirely human, and devolves upon every individual. Restoration and repair are not the sole responsibility of the **Zaddik**. He adopts and paraphrases Pinhas of Koretz' definition of **Tikkun**:

It is to be concerned not only with yourself but with everything that goes on around you; help others and you will help yourself. You want to serve God? Start with serving his children.<sup>59</sup>

In Wiesel's first two novels, **Dawn** and **The Accident**, the protagonist allows the memory of the dead to isolate him from his contemporaries. The later novels reject this perspective. In **The Town Beyond the Wall** and subsequent novels, the protagonist signals his commitment to life by acknowledging his responsibility for the well-being of at least one other individual. The memory of the dead is

still dominant, but serves either to alert the protagonist to injustice (**The Oath**), or is channelled into a commitment to others: "the way to fight death is to create life".<sup>60</sup>

Wiesel is adamant that the most positive response to the Holocaust is **Tikkun**, understood as compassion for others and opposition to injustice. He offers an ethical or humanitarian , rather than a strictly theological response to the Holocaust. He does not privilege belief over unbelief, and thus offers a response that is meaningful to both religious and secular Jews, albeit not necessarily to Orthodox Jews. The appropriate response to the Holocaust is an increased sensitivity to injustice, rather than a theological explanation of the silence of God--whether in terms of the end of the covenant, **Hester panim**, or the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz:

In the face of suffering, one has no right to turn away, not to see. In the face of injustice, one may not look the other way. When someone suffers, and it is not you, he comes first....To watch over a man who grieves is a more urgent duty than to think of God.<sup>61</sup>

Wiesel's emphasis on increased sensitivity to injustice is informed by his acute memory of the Holocaust victims' isolation: neighbours looked "the other way" while they were being deported.<sup>58</sup> As a result, he attaches great importance to showing solidarity with the victims of injustice, even if such support has no immediate practical results: it is essential to show the victims that they are remembered, that they are not alone.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Wiesel's religious response to the Holocaust incorporates both his writing and his human rights campaigning; the two activities are intrinsically related: "My life is a commentary on my books, not the other way round."<sup>64</sup> His popularity is related to the fact that he offers a personal response to the Holocaust that is also practical: he suggests ways in which both Jews and Christians can practically channel what is primarily an emotional response.

CONCLUSION:

Elie Wiesel's influence on Jewish and Christian responses to the Holocaust is undeniable. As a writer and speaker, he has achieved widespread popularity, particularly in the United States. His influence on academic thinking on the Holocaust has been acknowledged.<sup>65</sup> Rubenstein, Berkovits, and Fackenheim acknowledge his influence. How is this popularity and influence to be accounted for? Haas suggests that Wiesel's popularity arises from his personal style, his mysticism, and his refusal to adopt a formal philosophical or theological approach.<sup>66</sup> Wiesel's personal experience lends his voice greater authority. However, other survivors have written and spoken of the Holocaust, but only Primo Levi has attained an equivalent<sup>level</sup> of popularity. The major factor contributing to Wiesel's influence is his choice of medium: storytelling, rather than formal philosophy and theology. First, this makes his work more accessible than that of Rubenstein, Berkovits, and Fackenheim. Wiesel's *Night* and Levi's *If This is a Man* have become two of the most influential texts in discussions of the Holocaust. These two memoirs have provided two of the now-paradigmatic texts for discussion of a religious response to the Holocaust: the child-hanging scene and the definition of a *muselmann*.

Second, literature appears to be a more appropriate medium for a response to the Holocaust. The weakness of Berkovits' and Fackenheim's approach lies in the unintentional privileging of the "authentic" testimony of armed and spiritual resistance. Both claim to adopt a dialectical approach that incorporates both positive and negative testimony, but ultimately sacrifice the latter to protect the former. Rubenstein's weakness lies in his refusal to adopt a dialectical approach: he ignores both the dialectical nature of a major strand within covenantal thought, and the challenge posed by the existence of a spectrum of <sup>religious</sup> responses during the Holocaust. In rejecting the covenant, he implicitly privileges the rejection of belief over faith. All three thinkers ultimately resolve

the conflicting claims of belief and unbelief; Rubenstein in favour of unbelief (or at least the rejection of covenantal faith), and Berkovits and Fackenheim in favour of belief. Wiesel adopts literature as a medium precisely because it allows him to leave such tensions unresolved. Irving Greenberg suggests that, after the Holocaust, the storyteller becomes the authoritative teacher in Judaism: in a time of the silence of God and the consequent break in the covenant, all that remains are fragments of faith.<sup>67</sup> Such a fragmented faith is essentially dialectical, being beset with tensions; for example, between promise and counter-testimony; faith and unbelief; past and present; fervour and the loss of **emunah**; humanity as the image of God and the **muselmann**; election and selection; language and silence. As a medium, literature allows these tensions to be explored, but does not require that they be resolved. For Wiesel, the only possible resolution of these tensions would require the reversal of history, and the restoration of the dead to life; a reversal that he knows to be impossible. In the absence of this reversal, no resolution is possible, therefore the Trial of God continues. To abandon or affirm the covenant would be to accept a partial resolution of the rupture generated by the Holocaust, and would thus minimise the injustice of God's silence during the Holocaust.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Elie Wiesel, **Night**, 45.
2. Elie Wiesel, **One Generation After**, 166.
3. Ibid.
4. Elie Wiesel, **The Trial of God**, trans. Marion Wiesel, (1979), New York: Schocken Books, 1986, 128.
5. Ibid. 125.
6. Wiesel, **Night**, 57.
7. Wiesel, **One Generation After**, 127.
8. Wiesel, **Night**, 44.
9. Elie Wiesel, **The Gates of the Forest**, 225.
10. Elie Wiesel, **Legends of Our Times**, 7. See the entire essay, 'The Death of My Father', 1-7, for a discussion of this point at greater length.
11. Wiesel, **Night**, 79.
12. Elie Wiesel, **Ani Maamin: A Song Lost and Found Again**, trans. Marion Wiesel, New York: Random House, 1973, 69-71.
13. Wiesel, **Night**, 78.
14. Ibid. 76-7.
15. André Neher, **The Exile of the Word**, 218.
16. Emil Fackenheim, **What is Judaism?**, 289.
17. Bryon Sherwin, 'Elie Wiesel and Jewish Theology', 50-1.
18. Jürgen Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, trans. R. A. Wilson & John Bowden, London: SCM, 1974; Richard Bauckham, 'Theodicy from Ivan Karamazov to Moltmann', **Modern Theology**, 1987, 4: 1, 83-97, 93-4.
19. Alice L. Eckardt and A. Roy Eckardt, **Long Night's Journey into Day: A Revised Retrospective on the Holocaust**, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988, 114-7.
20. John K. Roth, **A Consuming Fire: Encounters with Elie Wiesel and the Holocaust**, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979, 63-4.
21. Robert McAfee Brown, **Elie Wiesel: Messenger to All Humanity**, Notre Dame & London, 1983, 55-6.
22. Wiesel, **Night**, 73-5.
23. Elie Wiesel, **A Beggar in Jerusalem**, 99.
24. Wiesel, **Legends of Our Times**, 2.
25. Elie Wiesel, **Twilight**, 46 ( Deut. 28: 15-68).
26. Wiesel, **One Generation After**, 41.
27. Wiesel, **Legends of Our Time**, 36.
28. Ibid. 34.

29. Elie Wiesel, **Somewhere a Master**, 215; Harry James Cargas, **Harry James Cargas in Conversation with Elie Wiesel**, 110.
30. Wiesel, **Night**, 92.
31. Wiesel, **Ani Maamin**, 33.
32. Ed. Irving Abrahamson, **Against Silence**, Vol. I, 211.
33. Elie Wiesel, 'Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future', **Judaism**, 1967, 16: 3, 281-4, 281.
34. Michael Berenbaum, **The Vision of the Void**; and 'The Additional Covenant' in eds. Rosenfeld and Greenberg, **Confronting the Holocaust**, 169-85.
35. Wiesel, **A Beggar in Jerusalem**, 199-200.
36. Elie Wiesel, 'Talking and Writing and Keeping Silent', in eds. Franklin Littell and Hubert Locke, **The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust**, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974, 269-77, 269-74.
37. Wiesel, **A Beggar in Jerusalem**, 210.
38. Cargas, **Harry James Cargas in Conversation with Elie Wiesel**, 85.
39. Byron Sherwin, 'Wiesel's Midrash: The Writings of Elie Wiesel and Their relationship to the Jewish Tradition', in eds. Rosenfeld and Greenberg, **Confronting the Holocaust**, 117-32, 125.
40. Ibid. 123.
41. **Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael**, Ibid.
42. Ibid. 125.
43. Elie Wiesel, **Souls on Fire**, 99.
44. Elie Wiesel, **A Jew Today**, 6.
45. Elie Wiesel, 'Why I Write', in eds. Rosenfeld and Greenberg, **Confronting the Holocaust**, 200-6, 205.
46. The Introduction, in Wiesel, **The Trial of God**.
47. On the influence of Dostoyevsky and Camus on Wiesel, see: Bauckham, 'Theodicy from Ivan Karamazov to Moltmann'; and Rosette C. Lamont, 'Elie Wiesel: In Search of a Tongue', in eds. Rosenfeld and Greenberg, **Confronting the Holocaust**, 80-98, 85-98.
48. Ed. Abrahamson, **Against Silence**, Vol. I, 145.
49. See: Fyodor Dostoyevsky, **The Brothers Karamazov**, trans. David Magarshack, (1880), London: Penguin, 1983, 266-311; Albert Camus, **The Plague**, trans. Stuart Gilbert, (1947), London: Penguin, 1986, 105-8, 177-9.
50. Elie Wiesel, 'Recalling Swallowed-Up Worlds', **Christian Century**, 1981, 98, 609-12, 611-2.
51. Wiesel, **A Jew Today**, 164.
52. Wiesel, **The Gates of the Forest**, 199.
53. Wiesel, **A Jew Today**, 187.



54. Ibid. 188.
55. See: 'My Teachers' and 'The Wandering Jew', in Wiesel, **Legends of Our Time**; 'The Death of My Teacher', in Wiesel, **One Generation After**; and 'Dodye Feig' in Wiesel, **A Jew Today**.
56. Wiesel, **Souls on Fire**, 206.
57. Berenbaum, **The Vision of the Void**, 59.
58. Elie Wiesel, **Messengers of God**, 235.
59. Wiesel, **Somewhere a Master**, 211.
60. Wiesel, **A Beggar in Jerusalem**, 99.
61. Wiesel, **Messengers of God**, 57.
62. See: Wiesel, **Night**, 33; Wiesel, **Legends of Our Times**, 121-3, 125-7.
63. See: Elie Wiesel, **The Jews of Silence: A Personal Report on Soviet Jewry**, trans. Neal Kozodoy, (1966), New York: Schocken Books, 1987; 'Moscow Revisited', in Wiesel, **Legends of Our Time**; 'Russian Sketches' in Wiesel, **One Generation After**; 'A Quest for Jerusalem', 'Why Solzhenitsyn Troubles Me', and 'To a Young Jew in Soviet Russia', in Wiesel, **A Jew Today**.
64. Wiesel, in Fred Downing, 'Autobiography, Fiction and Faith: Reflections on the Literary and Religious Pilgrimage of Elie Wiesel', **Remembering for the Future**, Theme II, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988, 1441-1455, 1441.
65. The influence of Elie Wiesel on both Jewish and Christian thinkers is illustrated by two collections of essays on his work: eds. Rosenfeld and Greenberg, **Confronting the Holocaust**; and ed. Harry James Cargas, **Responses to Elie Wiesel**.
66. Peter Haas, **Morality after Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic**, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988, 225-9.

PART III. CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO THE HOLOCAUST.

INTRODUCTION:

The Holocaust stands as radical counter-testimony to the revelatory promise of Judaism and Christianity. Both religions "proclaim a God who cares and the preciousness of the human in the image of God."<sup>1</sup> The Holocaust, typified by the **muselmann**, challenges both these claims. Thus, Jewish and Christian responses to the Holocaust reflect a common concern over the continued meaningfulness of the covenantal framework, and the claim that humanity is created in **imago dei**. However, Jewish and Christian responses differ radically in perspective.

A Jewish response to the Holocaust, as Fackenheim is swift to point out, reflects the perspective of a real, or potential victim of Nazism. The framework of a religious response to the event is provided by the covenant: God's silence is problematic precisely because of His covenantal promise to protect His Chosen People. The Jews' status as victims during the Holocaust stands as radical counter-testimony to their election as Chosen People. By contrast, a Christian response to the Holocaust is articulated from within a religious and cultural tradition that was a causal factor in the event taking place. Thus, in addition to acknowledging the Holocaust's status as counter-testimony to covenantal promise, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of a persistent thread of anti-Judaism within Christian theology and Church history. A Christian response to the Holocaust has both an external and an internal character; constituting a dialogue with both the counter-testimony of the event, and an internal dialogue with the Christian tradition that seeks to identify and expurgate those elements that contributed towards theological anti-Judaism. A Jewish response is concerned with whether the covenantal tradition continues to provide a valid basis for post-Holocaust Judaism. A Christian response is handicapped by the fact that the tradition is held to be flawed. Christian theology is not only challenged by the counter-testimony of the Holocaust, it is implicated: Christian anti-Judaism was a significant

contributory factor in enabling the Holocaust to take place.

The key question concerns the centrality of anti-Judaism within the Christian tradition. Is it possible to articulate Christianity in a way that does not denigrate both Jews and Judaism? Those who articulate a Christian response to the Holocaust reply in the affirmative to this question, but demand that theology be reformulated in the light of the event--to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>2</sup> In an Anglo-American context, the two most influential reformulations of Christian theology are those of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Jürgen Moltmann.<sup>4</sup> Both responses arise from a concern with political and liberation theology--understood in terms of messianic faith.<sup>3</sup> However, Ruether and Moltmann differ in the significance they attach to the Christian legacy of anti-Judaism. Ruether asserts that anti-Judaism is an integral part of christology. If anti-Judaism is to be eliminated from Christian theology, it is essential to reformulate this central doctrine. Moltmann differs in seeing anti-Judaism as a distortion, rather than an essential part of the tradition. Thus, whereas Ruether responds to the Holocaust by offering a defence of her thesis that anti-Judaism is an essential part of traditional Christian theology, Moltmann sees himself as reclaiming a traditional (Pauline / Lutheran) understanding of the Cross that provides a sufficient basis for responding to the Holocaust. Ruether would also claim to be recovering and restating a vision already present. However, she would locate this as existing prior to the corruption of the tradition.

Rosemary Radford Ruether and Jürgen Moltmann mark opposite ends of the spectrum. Ruether argues that the tradition is incapable of responding to the Holocaust, unless a radical reformulation takes place. Moltmann argues that a reformulation is required, but that this takes the form of a recovery of the biblical, particularly the Pauline, understanding of the Cross. Christology, correctly understood, provides the basis for a Christian

response to the Holocaust. Between these two poles, there is a third strategy--that of Johann Baptist Metz. Metz is aware of the work of both Ruether and Moltmann, and suggests an approach that combines the emphases of both. He strives to combine the former's emphasis on the centrality of anti-Judaism in Christian theology with the latter's strategy of reformulation and recovery. This approach has received less attention than either Ruether's or Moltmann's, but marks an attempt to incorporate the strengths of both thinkers, while striving to eradicate the weaknesses. An analysis of the theological responses of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Jürgen Moltmann, and Johann Baptist Metz serves to represent the spectrum of strategies for reformulating the Christian tradition in the light of the Holocaust.

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1. Irving Greenberg, 'Religious Values after the Holocaust', in ed. Abraham Peck, **Jews and Christians after the Holocaust**, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982, 64.
  2. The need to reformulate Christian theology after the Holocaust is acknowledged by both the Catholic and Protestant churches. See: Geoffrey Wigoder, **Jewish-Christian Relations since the Second World War**, Manchester: Manchester University Press, chapters 1 and 3; and World Council of Churches, **The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements by the World Council of Churches and its Member Churches**, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988.
  3. See: Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'The Development of My Thought', **Religious Studies Review**, 1989, 15: 1, 1-4; Rosemary Radford Ruether, **To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism**, London: SCM, 1981; Jürgen Moltmann, **Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology**, trans. James W. Leitch, 1967; Jürgen Moltmann, **The Experiment Hope**, trans. M. Douglas Meeks, London: SCM, 1975; Jürgen Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 1-6.
  4. For the influence of Rosemary Radford Ruether, see: Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi, 'The Socialist Feminist Vision of Rosemary Radford Ruether: A Challenge to Liberal Feminism', **Religious Studies Review**, 1989, 15: 1, 4-8; Rebecca S. Chopp, 'Seeing and Naming the World Anew: The Works of Rosemary Radford Ruether', **Religious Studies Review**, 1989, 15: 1, 8-11; ed. Alan T. Davies, **Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity**, New York, Ramsey & Toronto, 1979; John Gager, **The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity**, Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 1983; James F. Moore, 'A Spectrum of Views: Traditional Christian Responses to the Holocaust', **Journal of Ecumenical Studies**, 1988, 25: 2, 212-24, 219-21. For the influence of Jürgen Moltmann, see: Richard Bauckham, **Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making**, Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1987; Alice L. and A. Roy Eckardt, **Long Night's Journey into Day**, 102-23; ed. Frederick Herzog, **The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology**, New York: Herder & Herder, 1970; George Hunsinger, 'The Crucified God and the Political Theology of Violence', **Heythrop Journal**, 1973, 14, 266-79, 379-95; John MacQuarrie, 'Today's Word for Today: I. Jürgen Moltmann', **Expository Times**, 1980, 92, 4-7; Warren McWilliams, **Divine Suffering in Contemporary Protestant Theology**, Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1985, 27-49; Kenneth Surin, **Theology and the Problem of Evil**, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, 124-32.

7. ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER: FAITH AND FRATRICIDE.

7. 1. INTRODUCTION.

7. 2. THE CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIVE VISION.

7. 3. "THE LEFT HAND OF CHRISTOLOGY".

7. 4. ANTI-JUDAISM IN CHURCH HISTORY.

7. 5. CHRISTIANITY AND THE HOLOCAUST.

7. 1. INTRODUCTION.

The question of Christian anti-Judaism is only one among many themes running throughout the work of Rosemary Radford Ruether. Her study of Christian anti-Judaism arises out of a more general concern with "the interconnection between theological ideas and social practice.", inspired in turn by the American civil rights movement, the peace movement, and the Second Vatican Council.<sup>1</sup> In Ruether's analysis, all forms of social injustice are reflections of an hierarchical society: racism, religious bigotry (and the combination of the two in anti-Semitism); sexism, and ecological damage are all forms of institutional violence in a hierarchically ordered world. Thus, the analysis of the Holocaust and Christian anti-Judaism is contextualised within a broader systematic theology.

Ruether's thesis is that institutional injustice is hierarchical, reflecting the division of an original unity into "head" and "body". The former is separated from, and deemed superior to the latter. Thus, the "head" is identified with: whites, Christians, men, the First World, and humanity; whereas, the "body" is identified with: blacks, non-Christians, women, the Third World, and the natural world. The unity of creation is divided into a hierarchy, in which the "head" assumes all positive qualities, and the "body" is identified with all that is negative. Thus, hierarchy is understood as a form of dualism between good and evil, truth and falsehood.

In reading social injustice in terms of a descent from unity to hierarchy, Ruether offers a variant on the

Fall. Her methodology calls for a critique of ideology, in the hope of returning beyond ideology to a paradisal state of unity. She acknowledges the arbitrary nature of this portrayal of paradise-Fall-Return: the ideal exists only in the imagination; in effect, it is a statement of value. The ideal is posited to justify the eradication of perceived hierarchical injustice. In theological terms, the myth of a non-hierarchical ideal serves to justify the uprooting of the tradition: the tradition itself is hierarchical and thus corrupt. The myth of paradisal unity justifies the selective use of the tradition. Those elements of the tradition deemed non-hierarchical are retained; those elements considered "corrupt" are rejected:

In the literal sense of the word, there is no possibility of return to some period of the tradition that predates the intervening history. So the myth of return to origins is a way of making a more radical interpretation of the revelatory paradigm to encompass contemporary experiences, while discarding institutions and traditions that contradict meaningful, just, and truthful life.<sup>2</sup>

In Ruether's view, the "contemporary experiences" that demand incorporation into the tradition are primarily those of women and blacks--the primary victims of hierarchical injustice. The spirituality and religious experience of such groups is privileged over the theological tradition. The latter is only valid to the extent that it supports the former.<sup>3</sup>

The critique of the tradition takes place on the basis of a "critical transformative vision" culled from the Old and New Testaments. There are four elements in this vision:

- (1) God's defense and vindication of the oppressed;
- (2) the critique of the dominant systems of power and their powerholders;
- (3) the vision of a new age to come in which the present system of injustice is overcome and God's intended reign of peace and justice is installed in history; and
- (4) finally, the critique of ... religion .... Prophetic faith denounces religious ideologies and systems that function to justify and sanctify the dominant, unjust social order.<sup>4</sup>



Such a vision has its roots in the teaching of the Prophets and is developed in the New Testament. The teaching of the Prophets is perceived as primarily hierarchical, criticising, but not rejecting the existing social order. Jesus' teaching rejects hierarchy: "The division of humanity into separate races is seen as overcome, symbolized by the division into Jew and Greek".<sup>5</sup> However, the Early Church either spiritualised this equality ("we are all one in Christ"), or projected it into the eschatological future, thus ensuring the survival of hierarchical structures. Ruether responds to her critics by acknowledging that her "critical transformative vision" has no clear exegetical basis in the biblical tradition; but argues that, in view of the flawed, hierarchical nature of the tradition, such a failure is inevitable. In arguing that the religious experience of oppressed groups is "the starting point and ending point of the hermeneutical circle", Ruether creates a methodology that excludes external criticism.<sup>6</sup> Criticism on the basis of the tradition is equated with the perpetuation of hierarchical injustice: the tradition itself is deemed intrinsically corrupt.

Ruether's analysis of Christian anti-Judaism can be seen as her critique of hierarchy in microcosm. Her analysis imagines a similar pattern of ideal-Fall-Return, achieved through the recovery of the "critical transformative vision". The relationship between Church and Synagogue is one between "head" and "body", with a critical equality being transformed into a destructive, hierarchical inequality. Little weight is attached to traditional biblical scholarship or to classical christology: both are reformulated in the light of Ruether's hierarchical thesis. As a result, the positive contribution of Ruether's trenchant analysis of Christian anti-Judaism is undermined by her failure to seriously engage with any evidence that counteracts her thesis.

#### 7. 2. THE CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIVE VISION:

the New Testament conflict with the dominant religious authorities of Judaism operated in the

mission of Jesus and the earliest Christians as a criticism of fossilised religion to call Judaism itself back to its prophetic-messianic mission. But when Christianity moved to become a separate Gentile religion and, eventually the dominant religion of the Roman Empire, this same language was used to express both the rejection of Judaism itself as an inferior religion and the chauvinist triumphalism of the Church over the synagogue.

Christianity initially emerged as a messianic renewal movement within Judaism. Anti-Judaism developed as Christianity increasingly became an independent movement. Hence, Ruether's use of the image of fratricide: anti-Judaism is understood as a form of sibling rivalry. The relationship between the Church and the Synagogue is interpreted in hierarchical terms: the early Christians moved away from the original unity of Jesus' prophetic critique (arising from and addressed to a Jewish matrix) towards a dualistic separation of "head" and "body". Jesus dialectical critique is dislocated from its original setting: the twin prophetic elements of judgement and promise come to be identified with the historical fates of two distinct communities. The negative elements of Jesus' message are perceived to be addressed to the Jews; whereas, the positive elements are assumed to relate to the early Christians. This process begins in Pauline theology, but does not achieve its fully fledged form until after the conversion of Constantine in the Patristic *Adversus Judaeos* tradition.

Ruether suggests that Jesus' ministry should be viewed in the context of criticism of the Jerusalem Temple--by the Essenes and Zealots. In this scenario, Jesus is a critic of the alliance between the religious authorities and the state. As a critic of the established order, Jesus stands in the tradition of the Prophets. The Cross represents the culmination of this confrontation with the existing hierarchy. The Early Church emerges as a "countercultural" movement within first century Judaism.<sup>8</sup> Although simplistic (Ruether pays scant attention to the spectrum of opinion within Jerusalem itself, notably the tension existing between the Sadducees and Pharisees),

such an analysis falls within mainstream New Testament scholarship.<sup>9</sup> It is the detail of Ruether's analysis that is considerably more controversial, notably her insistence that anti-Judaism arises from the transformation of Jesus' prophetic, dialectical style of teaching into a series of dualisms.

Ruether argues that Jesus' message and that of the early Christians developed around a series of dialectical pairings--between judgement and promise, law and grace, letter and spirit, particularism and universalism. This dialectical style has prophetic roots: the deuteronomic history is rooted in a series of blessings and curses; covenantal faithfulness meets with prosperity, faithlessness with disaster (Deut. 28; Josh. 7-8). The prophetic critique of religious and social corruption is balanced by the assurance that a faithful remnant will survive the coming disaster (Isa. 1; Hosea 1-2; Amos 9). Prophetic judgement is contextualised within the covenantal framework. The Early Church increasingly came to present Jesus' message as an external critique of both Jews and Judaism. The dialectical nature of prophetic criticism is displaced by the polarization of dualisms, in which "one member of each becomes inordinately valued, the other correspondingly disvalued."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, judgement and promise, rather than forming the basis of covenantal life, become polarised: promise is applied exclusively to the Church, while judgement is passed on Judaism. The Church becomes heir to the covenantal promise (Rom. 4). As a consequence, Judaism is superseded by the Church: election passes from the former to the latter (Gal. 3:10-29, 4:21-31, 5:12). The military defeats of 70 and 135 were interpreted as proof of God's judgement on the Jews for their rejection of Jesus as Messiah. As inheritors of the promise, the Church alone is able to interpret Scripture: the key being faith in Jesus' messiahship.

The key question concerns the point at which this development began to take place. Ruether acknowledges that

fully fledged anti-Judaism does not arise until Christianity became predominantly Gentile, and--after the conversion of Constantine--the state religion of the Roman Empire. Controversy surrounds the precise nature of the relationship between the post-Constantine, Patristic **Adversus Judaeos** tradition, and the anti-Judaism in the New Testament. Ruether claims that, although the **Adversus Judaeos** tradition is a later, gentile construct, it has firm roots in the New Testament, particularly in the Pauline and Johannine texts. The biblical text reflects the basis themes of the later Patristic tradition: the insistence that the death of Jesus be interpreted as the culmination of the Jewish people's hostility to the Prophets (Acts 7:51-2; 1 Thess. 2:14-6; Matt. 23:30-6). Jesus' critique of hierarchical religions is developed by Paul to suggest that the Law has no positive redemptive role, apart from the revelation of sin (Rom. 7:7-24; Col. 2:8, 20; Gal. 4:3; 2 Cor. 3:7-18). Ruether concludes that:

the view of both Paul and the New Testament as a whole is that the Jews have lost their election. The covenant with Moses has no power to save. The promise resides solely in the church, and only by repenting and joining the church can the Jews be saved (Acts 28:28; Rom. 9-11). The destruction of Jerusalem is the sign of their present reprobate status (Matt. 23:36-24:2).<sup>11</sup>

In the period between the second and fifth centuries, the **Adversus Judaeos** tradition "greatly elaborated" these themes in a way that "hardened the lines" between the Jewish and Christian communities.

Ruether's analysis of the relationship between New Testament and Patristic anti-Judaism is misleading: while emphasising the lines of continuity, she pays insufficient attention to the elements of discontinuity. However negative, the New Testament references to the Jews still fall within the parameters of an inner, dialectical critique of Judaism. There is a qualitative distinction between New Testament and later, Gentile anti-Judaism:

the earliest Christians were Jews, and however harshly a Jew may criticize his own people, his

stance is vastly different from that of a gentile using the same proof texts and interpretations.<sup>12</sup>

The New Testament texts were written against the gradual demarcation of boundaries between the Jewish community and the Early Church. Thus, many of Paul's negative references to the Jews and the Law have to be set within the context of his disputes with "Judaisers" over entrance requirements for converts. This dispute is one internal to the Early Church: the question being whether gentile converts have to be circumcised and observe the food laws (Acts 15:1-30; Gal. 2:1-10). The Johannine references to the Jews have to be set against the background of increasing tension and separation between the Early Church and the Jewish community.<sup>13</sup> Thus, although the New Testament references to the Jews are later employed within a dualist context (the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition), they are not, in themselves, dualist.

Thus, the New Testament pairings of judgement and promise, law and grace, letter and spirit, reflect the Early Christians' attempts at self-definition within a predominantly Jewish matrix. Jesus emerged as the charismatic leader of a messianic, renewal movement within first century Judaism. This renewal movement was one among many in the first century, all identifying themselves over and against the Jerusalem religious establishment. As the Early Church's membership became predominantly gentile, the demarcation between the Church and the Jewish religious community became increasingly apparent. The loss of their original Jewish context caused the above pairings to be seen in increasingly polemical and dualist terms. The historical and social separation of the two communities was reflected in a dislocated reading of such theological pairings. The historical ascendancy of the Early Church was identified with the positive symbols of promise, grace and spirit; whereas the military defeats of 70 and 135, and subsequent exile, were retroactively interpreted as judgement on the Jewish failure to recognise Jesus as Messiah.

7. 3. "THE LEFT-HAND OF CHRISTOLOGY":

Theologically, anti-Judaism developed as the left-hand of christology. Anti-Judaism was the negative side of the Christian affirmation that Jesus was the Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Ruether's thesis is that anti-Judaism emerged as the Early Church became increasingly gentile and lost sight of its Jewish roots. One consequence of this process was the distortion of Jesus' dialectical, prophetic critique into a series of dualisms. A more disturbing consequence was the increasingly triumphalist character of the Church's self-consciousness. Judaism was deemed to be an "inferior", "fossilized" religion: the Law had no redemptive significance, other than to reveal sin. The destruction of the Temple was interpreted as divine judgement on the Jews' failure to recognise Jesus as Messiah. Ruether suggests that there was a parallel development in the Church's christological understanding. Jesus saw himself as an eschatological prophet or forerunner, paving the way for the imminent coming of the Messiah. The Church transformed this hope into a doctrine of fulfilled messianism centred on the figure of Jesus. The future hope of Jesus and his earliest followers is held to be fulfilled in the cross and resurrection, and in the subsequent life of the Church. Anti-Judaism gains its greatest impetus from this transition from future to realised eschatology. In order to eradicate anti-Judaism from Christian theology, it is necessary to recover Jesus' original message; such a recovery requires the rejection of traditional christology in favour of a paradigmatic and proleptic interpretation of his ministry.

The key to Ruether's analysis lies in her assertion that anti-Judaism is intrinsically linked to christology:

The anti-Judaic patterns of Christian theology were and are still today tied to a dogma of fulfilled messianism. So it is not possible to rethink these anti-Judaic patterns without questioning its christological basis.<sup>16</sup>

The assertion that Jesus did not make any messianic claims about his own person is foundational to this thesis.

Ruether adopts a stance akin to that of Albert Schweitzer: she emphasises the imminent eschatological hope of Jesus and his earliest disciples, rejecting any suggestion that the resurrection marks the fulfilment of this expectation.<sup>16</sup> Rather than claiming to be Messiah, Jesus either saw himself as the eschatological prophet preparing the way for the One who was to come, or saw his lordship as belonging to the future.<sup>17</sup>

On the basis of this reading of Jesus' self-understanding, Ruether asserts that any doctrine of realised eschatology is a distortion of the original kerygma. She rejects any messianic interpretation of the resurrection:

the Resurrection is not the final happening of the eschatological event, but the proleptic experiencing of the final future of mankind in advance, we affirm Jesus' hope in his name.<sup>18</sup>

The resurrection is to be interpreted proleptically: as the basis for hope in an as yet unrealised messianic future. In proclaiming Jesus as Messiah and the fulfilment of the messianic proof texts of the Old Testament, the Early Church radically altered the meaning of the term. In a Jewish context, the coming of the Messiah is marked by the physical establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. The earliest Christians lived in the expectation, first that Jesus would establish the kingdom of God in his lifetime (Mk. 10:35-46, 11:1-10, 15-19); and subsequently, in his imminent return in glory (Mk. 9:1, 13:30; Matt. 10:23; Lk. 22:18; 1 Thess. 4:13-8). However, neither of these hopes was fulfilled: the world remains in travail. Ruether suggests that the Church responded to this challenge by suppressing "the social justice dimension fundamental to the entire prophetic tradition of messianic hope."<sup>19</sup> The establishment of justice on earth is dislocated from the fulfilment of messianic hope. Thus, the resurrection can be interpreted as the fulfilment of messianic hope regardless of the unredeemed state of the world. Ruether suggests that it is this equation between the resurrection and the fulfilment of messianic hope that

results in the adoption of a triumphalist approach to other faiths, and particularly towards the Jews.

Both Ruether's thesis and her reconstruction of early Christian origins are highly problematic. In effect, she relies upon a distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Her thesis requires the existence of a moment in Jesus' ministry, or Christian history, that is free of anti-Judaism--"within the teachings of Jesus himself I would find nothing of what I would call Christian anti-Judaism."<sup>20</sup> However, such a quest appears futile in the light of the disparity of recent attempts to define Jesus' self-understanding:

The enormous variety of Jesus-images in modern scholarship suggests that we should limit ourselves to speaking of sayings and stories in circulation before the written gospels, some of which may well go back to the figure of Jesus.<sup>21</sup>

The difficulties inherent in the search for "the real Jesus" or the "original gospel" are reflected in Ruether's reconstruction. On the one hand, she presents a portrait of Jesus as eschatological prophet, in language akin to that used to describe John the Baptist (Mk. 1:4-8; Matt. 3:1-13). However, in doing so, she ignores the considerable number of texts, particularly parables, that suggest some form of realised eschatology.<sup>22</sup> Second, if Jesus made no messianic claims for himself, in what way does he differ from other teachers, such as Hillel, Shammai, or Akiba? Yet, if Jesus did make messianic claims concerning his future "lordship", in what way does he differ from other failed messiahs, such as Bar Kochba or Shabbetai Zvi? Why is Jesus, as opposed to Shabbetai Zvi, to be regarded as the basis of our future hope? Even as the leader of a renewal movement within Judaism, there must have been some element in Jesus' teaching or self-understanding that was distinctive. Ruether fails to identify what element in Jesus' message was sufficient to lead to the creation, and continuing existence of a separate, non-Jewish religious group: what is specifically **Christian** about Christianity?



Ruether calls for a proleptic and paradigmatic interpretation of the resurrection in place of classical christology. The resurrection is to be understood proleptically: the Church continues to proclaim Jesus' hope in his name. The resurrection is interpreted paradigmatically: the countercultural equality of the original Jesus-movement becomes the paradigm for a reformulated, non-hierarchical Church. However, what exactly is the nature of this hope that is being proclaimed in Jesus' name, until such time when justice will be established on earth? In **Sexism and God-Talk**, she identifies Christian hope as a non-hierarchical society of equals. Ruether suggests that Jesus offers a critique of the "deformations of messianic language": the Old Testament vision of the New Age envisions a "triumphant reversal of domination" (Zech. 14:16-9); whereas Jesus offers a non-hierarchical, messianic vision, with neither oppressors, nor oppressed. The discussion over power with the sons of Zebedee encapsulates Jesus' rejection of "the triumphalistic concept of messianism": power is identified with service (Matt. 20:17-28).<sup>23</sup> However, Ruether acknowledges that such a critique of hierarchical power can only be found in fragmentary form in the biblical tradition. The hope of a New Age of non-hierarchical equality functions as an external critique of the tradition, and is capable of existing independently on the basis of the religious experience of oppressed and marginal groups. Thus, the lack of a developed, alternative christology in Ruether's theology arises precisely because it is an inessential part of her theology: Jesus' message is read and reformulated in the light of contemporary religious experience, and thus, does not rest upon a christological basis.

Ruether's reformulation of Christianity arises as the logical consequence of her demand that the resurrection be reinterpreted as both proleptic and paradigmatic. Thus, her theology rests upon the assumption that traditional christology is a hierarchical corruption of Jesus' original message; anti-Judaism being one manifestation of

this corruption. However, in dispensing with classical christology, Ruether never engages with it. The tradition becomes a picture of unrelieved blackness, save for those elements that reflect Ruether's concerns with equality and service. She never seriously considers whether it is possible to stay within the tradition, and yet remain free of anti-Judaism. A similar one-sidedness dominates Ruether's reading of Church history: she concentrates on negative attitudes to the Jews to the effective exclusion of the positive traditions within Christian theology. Second, although acknowledging that theological anti-Judaism emerged within the context of conflict between the early church and the Jewish authorities, Ruether never considers the extent to which theological developments were dependent on this context: to what extent did anti-Judaism arise as a result of the sociological context, rather than because of the theological content of the Christian tradition?

#### 7. 4. ANTI-JUDAISM IN CHURCH HISTORY:

Since the fourth century after Christ, there have been three anti-Jewish policies: conversion, expulsion, and annihilation. The second appeared as an alternative to the first, and the third emerged as an alternative to the second....The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live. (Raul Hilberg)<sup>24</sup>

The thesis that there is a logical progression from Christian and secular anti-Jewish legislation to the Holocaust forms the basis of Raul Hilberg's magisterial work, **The Destruction of the European Jews**. Hilberg's thesis forms the basis of Ruether's reading of Church history. The Holocaust is presented as the logical consequence of the **Adversus Judaeos** tradition, and its social and political application. The presence of elements of continuity between Christian anti-Judaism and Nazi anti-Semitism is not disputed. Controversy surrounds the degree of continuity / discontinuity. The weakness of

Ruether's approach is that she emphasises continuity at the expense of the discontinuity.

Theological anti-Judaism reached its most developed form in the Patristic **Adversus Judaeos** tradition; a tradition that is encapsulated in St. John Chrysostom's **Eight Orations against the Jews** (386-7)--the "most violent and tasteless of the anti-Judaic literature of the period".<sup>25</sup> There are three major strands in this theological tradition, all of which have their roots in the New Testament. First, Jewish history is presented as a catalogue of crimes: the rejection of the prophets culminates in the rejection and murder of the Messiah. This history serves to justify God's rejection of the Jews as Chosen People in favour of the Church (Rom. 1:28-32, 2:1-11; Gal. 3: 19-22; Acts 3:12-20, 6:39-43). Second, this catalogue of crimes culminates in deicide, God-killing. The entire Jewish people, past, present and future is guilty of the murder of the Messiah (Matt. 27:24-6). Ruether suggests that the higher the christology, the greater the guilt attached to the Jews: the destruction of Jerusalem and eternal exile are the Jews' punishment for the death of the Son of God:

It is because you killed Christ. It is because you stretched out your hand against the Lord. It is because you shed the precious blood, that there is now no restoration, no mercy anymore and no defense.<sup>26</sup>

Third, the interpretation of Jewish history as a catalogue of crimes and the charge of deicide combine in the accusation that the Jews are innately sinful:

the synagogue is not only a whorehouse and a theater; it is also a den of thieves and a haunt of wild animals ... not the cave of a wild animal, but of an unclean wild animal....The Jews have no conception of [spiritual] things at all, but living for the lower nature, all agog for the here and now, no better disposed than pigs or goats, they live by the rule of debauchery and inordinate gluttony.<sup>27</sup>

Although extreme, the **Eight Orations against the Jews** encapsulate the major themes of the Patristic **Adversus Judaeos** tradition.

The three themes of the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition form the basis of subsequent Christian anti-Judaism. The charge of deicide persisted, to such an extent that Vatican II felt compelled to reject the imputation of guilt to "all Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today."<sup>28</sup> The Patristic imagery of the Jew as innately sinful merged with folk imagery of the Wandering Jew, and medieval imagery of the devil:

The image of the Jew deteriorated in the minds of Christians to that of a deformed monster, with horns, tail, cloven hoofs, and sulphuric odor to betray his fundamentally diabolic character.<sup>29</sup>

The increasingly virulent nature of anti-Judaic imagery was reflected in the attribution of supernatural powers. Anti-Judaism reflected the prevalent interest in witchcraft and the devils. Charges were rife that the Jews were responsible for outbreaks of plague and famine; fouling wells; and desecrating the eucharistic host. The Middle Ages also marked the emergence of the "blood libel"--the accusation that Jews killed Christian boys and drank their blood at Passover.

The development of theological anti-Judaism both influenced, and was fed by the social ostracization of the Jews within Christian society. With the conversion of Constantine, Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire, and was thus able to reflect its view of the Jews in law:

The basic principle of this legislation was that the Jews should be allowed only the bare minimum of continued rights to worship and exist, but should have no honor in Christian society and should be deprived of any possibility of holding authority over Christians.<sup>31</sup>

The Codes of Theodosius and Justinian (fifth and sixth century) "laid the basis for the debasement of the civic and personal status of the Jews in Christian society"<sup>31</sup> that was to continue until the emancipation of the nineteenth century. Jews were forbidden from owning slaves, and later serfs; barred from holding civil or military office prohibited from repairing existing synagogues or building new ones; compelled to wear

distinctive clothing, and live in segregated areas of towns and cities. Ruether's thesis echoes that of Raul Hilberg: both cite the manner in which Nazi anti-Jewish legislation built upon precedents in the Christian past.<sup>32</sup>

The key question concerns the degree of both continuity and discontinuity between Christian anti-Jewish legislation and the Holocaust. Hilberg points to the elements of continuity, but argues that bureaucratic, large-scale extermination was unique to the Holocaust.<sup>33</sup> Ruether differs in suggesting that past legislation, specifically the Spanish statutes of the Purity of Blood (Toledo, 1449), constitute a "dress rehearsal" for Nazi, racial anti-Semitism.<sup>34</sup> Although noting the discontinuity between Christian anti-Judaism and Nazi anti-Semitism, Ruether does this within the context of emphasising the continuity:

although Christian theology decreed misery for the Jews, it did not decree extermination. In fact it demanded their ongoing existence, although in a status of reprobation, as the continuing witness to the triumph of the church and as the final witness to Christ at the end of time. The paradox of the church's attitude to the Jews was that it was simultaneously committed to their preservation, and to making them exhibit externally the marks of their reprobation. It was out of this contradiction that the tragic history of the Jews in Christian society was to flow.<sup>35</sup>

However, as the Jewish historian, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi notes, the final sentence is "at least a partial non-sequitur": the tragedy arose from only one side of the paradox, "reprobation". The Holocaust was possible, in part, because the Christian tradition of "preservation" had fallen by the wayside.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the weakness of Ruether's thesis lies in its "unrelieved blackness"; in its "failure to balance the picture with the grays and whites of Christian-Jewish relations."<sup>37</sup> "Reprobation" is stressed at the expense, apart from a few cursory references, of "preservation".

The tradition of "preservation" was not a form of philo-Semitism. However, it did serve to limit the scope of anti-Jewish persecution. If the tradition of

reprobation was as widespread as Ruether suggests, the question arises as to why the Church did not destroy the Jews. Whereas, the penalty of heresy was death, the rights of Jews were defined and preserved. In interpreting the Theodosian and Justinian Codes in a purely negative light, Ruether ignores the fact that such legislation served to preserve Judaism's status as a **religio licita**. However much the Christian authorities denigrated and legislated against the Jews, they continued to recognise their legal right to exist:

That Jews are to be tolerated in the midst of Christendom, that they have the right to regulate their internal affairs according to their law, that they are entitled to a basic protection of life, property, and the free exercise of their religion so long as it does not directly interfere with the dominant faith--these principles remained constant in Christian law down through the Middle Ages.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the Jews' position was considerably more stable than that of heretical groups, such as the Donatists. Yerushalmi suggests that if the Marcionite interpretation of Scripture had prevailed, with its denigration of the Old Testament, then the Jews might have shared the fate of other early heretical groups.<sup>39</sup>

Second, Ruether's emphasis upon the "unrelieved blackness" of the reprobation of the Jews is reflected in her monolithic presentation of the Church. Great emphasis is placed upon local attacks on synagogues; pogroms during the crusades; the blood libel; and legislation such as the statutes of the Purity of Blood. However, such inordinate emphasis on the reprobation of the Jews results in an unbalanced picture of the authorities' attitude towards the Jews. Yerushalmi suggests an alternative reading of the same events. He notes that, in the Middle Ages, the lower clergy were perceived as hostile by the Jewish community, whereas the bishops and papacy were thought of as protectors: the **Constitutio pro Judaeis**, despite its pejorative tone, provided the basis for the legal protection of Jewish life and property. Excesses, such as the blood libel, were condemned, however half-heartedly, in official pronouncements. Those responsible for issuing

the initial statutes of the Purity of Blood were excommunicated, and the legislation denounced, by Pope Nicholas V. In spite of legal, social, and religious denigration of the Jews, there was no widespread policy of enslavement (as in Visigothic Spain), or forced baptism (as in fifteenth century Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella).<sup>40</sup> It is also inaccurate to suggest that theological anti-Judaism necessarily manifested itself in hostility to local Jewish communities: in spite of being theologically anti-Judaic, Bernard of Clairvaux issued an influential call against the massacre of the Jews that accompanied the Second Crusade.<sup>41</sup> Thus, Yerushalmi concludes that Christian anti-Judaic attitudes were considerably more complex than Ruether allows.

Ruether concludes that "Modern anti-Semitism is both a continuation and a transformation of the medieval theological and economic scapegoating of the Jews.". Modern anti-Semitism is a "transformation" of medieval "scapegoating": it "builds upon the medieval image of the Jew as a dangerous disease and demonic power", rather than taking its rationale from "the Jewish refusal to accept Jesus as the Christ and enter the church".<sup>42</sup> However, does the use of the term "transformation" suggest that modern anti-Semitism is "merely a metamorphosed medieval Christian anti-Semitism"?<sup>43</sup> Yerushalmi suggests that Ruether fails to explain why the physical extermination of the Jews was not envisioned earlier, if it is so obviously the logical extension of Christian anti-Judaism:

There is no question but that Christian anti-Semitism through the ages helped create the climate and mentality in which genocide, once conceived, could be achieved with little or no opposition. But even if we grant that Christian teaching was a necessary cause leading to the Holocaust, it was surely not a sufficient one.<sup>44</sup>

The crucial difference between modern, racial anti-Semitism and Christian anti-Judaism lies in the fact that, while the tradition of reprobation continued, that of preservation lapsed almost entirely. Whereas the ultimate Medieval anti-Judaic measure was expulsion, or forced

conversion, the Holocaust was a state-instigated programme of genocide. Ruether fails to acknowledge, or explain, the gulf between the two. Why, for instance, did Nicholas V feel compelled to denounce the statutes of the Purity of Blood, whereas Pius XII did not feel compelled to protest explicitly over the Nuremberg Laws, and the subsequent extermination of six million Jews? To suggest that there is a radical **discontinuity** between traditional Christian anti-Judaism and the Holocaust is not to minimise the importance of the former; it is to attempt to comprehend the specifically **modern** character of the latter.

#### 7. 5. CHRISTIANITY AND THE HOLOCAUST:

At its root anti-Semitism in Christian civilization springs directly from Christian theological anti-Judaism. It was Christian theology which developed the thesis of the eternal reprobate status of the Jew in history, and laid the foundation for the demonic view of the Jews which fanned the flames of popular hatred.<sup>45</sup>

Rosemary Ruether regards it as axiomatic that Christian anti-Judaism bears the fundamental responsibility for creating "the climate and mentality in which genocide, once conceived, could be achieved with little or no opposition.". She is prepared to concede that there are elements of discontinuity, but argues that even these have their roots in the Christian past. Thus, the racial nature of Nazi anti-Semitism is held to have precedents in both the medieval demonization of the Jew, and in the Spanish statutes of the Purity of Blood. However, in placing such a one-sided emphasis upon the elements of continuity, Ruether inevitably distorts the reality of the Holocaust.

Fackenheim, Rubenstein, and Yerushalmi suggest that the Holocaust's uniqueness lies, in part, in the absence of choice: previously, the options of conversion or apostasy remained open. The Holocaust marks a break with traditional anti-Judaism: "The issue is physical extermination. Not reprobation, discrimination, or any variety of opprobrium, but--**genocide**."<sup>46</sup> Ruether cedes that modern, racial anti-Semitism constitutes a



"transformation" of Christian anti-Judaism; one that excludes the options of apostasy and conversion:

In Nazism the Christian demonization of the Jews' spiritual condition was converted into spiritual demonization of their biological condition. Hence the Nazi final solution to the Jewish question was not religious conversion, but physical extermination.<sup>46</sup>

However, despite this concession, she insists that the demonization of the Jews' "biological condition" has its roots in Patristic and Medieval anti-Judaic imagery. The image of the Jew as demonic, vermin, or contagious disease recurs throughout the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition. Thus, the theory employed by Nazi anti-Semitism was already present; uniqueness lay in the "transformation" of theory into practice.

In proffering this interpretation, Ruether fails to explain why a widespread policy of extermination did not emerge until the twentieth century. Little or no significance is attached to the fact that the Holocaust occurred in the twentieth century, and not in the Middle Ages. If the theory behind the Holocaust was already present in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition, why was it not put into practice earlier? In emphasising the elements of continuity, Ruether glosses over crucial elements of discontinuity. Despite the similar use of imagery, the contexts of Christian anti-Judaism and Nazi anti-Semitism differ radically. Christian anti-Judaism was rooted in a religious context: it was primarily applied to those Jews who persisted in remaining Jews. The same strictures were not applied to converts; the descendants of converts, or those who intermarried--save in exceptional cases, as in Spain. The context of Nazi anti-Semitism was provided by the pseudo-scientific ideology of history as a biological struggle between various racial groups.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the "purity" of the Aryan Volk was perceived to be under threat from the bacillus of World Jewry. In the context of such a theory, the beliefs or practices of the individual Jew were irrelevant: the same threat was posed by the

nun, Edith Stein, as by the Hasids and Orthodox Jews of Eastern Europe.

Ruether identifies a further line of continuity in the reaction, or non-reaction, to the Holocaust on the part of the majority of Christians:

the Church must take responsibility for the perpetuation of the demonic myth of the Jew that allowed the Nazis to make the scapegoat of their project of racial purity. This Christian tradition also promoted an antipathy in Christians who too often felt little need to respond to the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors.<sup>48</sup>

Few critics would argue with either of these two statements. The problem lies in the fact that Ruether does not balance either with possible counter-testimony. In *Approaches to Auschwitz*, Richard Rubenstein and John Roth offer supporting evidence for Ruether's claims. They note that the lack of widespread opposition to the Holocaust arose because the "Jews were not considered as existing within the Christian universe of moral obligation".<sup>49</sup> Thus, while Church leaders felt compelled to protest over the fate of Jewish converts, they felt no similar obligation to protest over the fate of the Jews. Those who did protest, or offer aid to Jews were the exception rather than the rule.<sup>50</sup> In explanation of this lack of widespread opposition, Rubenstein and Roth suggest it is legitimate to draw parallels between the number of Jews killed and the pre-war level of anti-Semitism.<sup>51</sup> However, they also insist that it is necessary to take a variety of other factors into account. The level of Jewish victimization also correlates with the intensity of Nazi occupation: the Jewish death toll was at its highest in Eastern Europe and Western Russia. Other factors, such as nationalism and patriotism also have to be taken into account, particularly in the context of the German Church Struggle.<sup>52</sup>

Historical and political analyses of Nazi anti-Semitism and the Holocaust serve further to undermine Ruether's thesis. Sarah Gordon's analysis of the German response to the events of *Kristallnacht*, the Night of

Broken Glass, supports the suggestion that the lack of opposition was due to the **discontinuity** between the Holocaust and previous, Christian-inspired pogroms. She notes that the events of **Kristallnacht** inspired considerable complaint, mostly concerned at the damage to property, vandalism, and general lawlessness. However, the events of 9 November, 1938 were in the tradition of the pogrom (looting shops; burning synagogues; acts of violence against individual Jews). **Kristallnacht**, and the reaction to it, resulted in a power struggle over control of the "Jewish Question" between Goebbels on the one hand (as instigator of the event), and Goering and Himmler on the other. The latter triumphed; a victory that marked the transition to the bureaucratically administered, and strictly legal, "Final Solution".<sup>53</sup>

A consideration of the reactions to **Kristallnacht** succeeds in highlighting Ruether's failure to consider the essentially modern, technocratic nature of the Holocaust. In stressing the theological antecedents of the event, she fails to pay sufficient attention to historical and political analysis: by interpreting the causality of the Holocaust in primarily religious terms, she presents a distorted picture of both the event, and the social and political reality of Nazism. Her analysis of the lack of Christian opposition to the Holocaust fails to pay even minimal attention to the pressures exerted by a totalitarian state.<sup>54</sup>

Second, the emphasis placed upon the continuity of medieval and Nazi "demonization" of the Jew serves to direct attention away from the fundamentally pragmatic character of the Holocaust. Ruether asserts that the deathcamps had "the character of a gigantic demonic ritual".<sup>55</sup> On one level, such a suggestion can be supported by reference to the view that the Nazis displaced God during the Holocaust: the deathcamps constituted a self-enclosed universe in which the Nazis assumed the role of God, subverting biblical concepts such as election and the *imago dei*. However, on another level,

Ruether's interpretation serves to distort the functional and technocratic character of the Holocaust. The decision to hold selections and **aktionen** on Jewish Holy Days can be interpreted pragmatically: the timing serves to emphasise the extent of Nazi power over their victims. In exercising such power over Jewish life and death, the Nazis succeeded in assuming one divine attribute. However "demonic" in character, the deathcamps were primarily functional: they represented the culmination of a process of experimentation to discover the most efficient method of resolving the "Jewish Question". Alternative policies had been tried and found wanting: emigration, expulsion, a state-inspired pogrom (**Kristallnacht**); mass-shootings. These alternatives were deemed inadequate, either because the numbers involved were too small (emigration, expulsion); or public reaction (**Kristallnacht**); or the effect on the perpetrators (the mass-shootings of the **Einsatzgruppen**). The deathcamps themselves were refined continuously in order to maximise efficiency. Chelmno, Belzec, and Treblinka provided the prototype for Auschwitz, which was designed to be both efficient and financially self-sufficient.<sup>56</sup> Thus, however demonic in intent, in practice, the deathcamps represent an exercise in bureaucratic planning, modern technology, and business acumen.

It is the essentially modern--bureaucratic and technocratic--character of the Holocaust that suggests the answer to Yerushalmi's challenge to Ruether--that she explain why something comparable had not occurred earlier, if the Holocaust constitutes the logical culmination of the Christian tradition of social and theological vilification of the Jews. The Holocaust differed from previous, sporadic, "Christian" persecution of the Jews in being the state-controlled, bureaucratically administered, racially based, mass-production of death.

#### CONCLUSION:

Ruether's enterprise in **Faith and Fratricide**, and subsequent essays on anti-Semitism, has two primary aims.

First, to analyse and highlight the role of Christian anti-Judaism in creating an environment and atmosphere in which the Holocaust could take place. Second, to highlight the damaging repercussions that result from a corrupt and distorted, hierarchical reading of Christianity. Thus, **Faith and Fratricide** stands as an integral part of the attempt to reformulate Christian theology on a non-hierarchical basis. The privileging of the religious experience of the oppressed over theology results in a consciously selective attitude to biblical and theological texts: Ruether only employs those texts that support her thesis. Thus, those texts that contradict her reading of "christology" and the resurrection are rejected as later, corrupt deviations from Jesus' original message.

The advantage of Ruether's approach lies in the emphasis placed upon the Christian antecedents of Nazi anti-Semitism. **Faith and Fratricide** has effectively set the agenda for subsequent discussion of anti-Judaism within Christian theology and Church history, and the extent to which this created an atmosphere and environment in which the Holocaust could take place with little or no opposition.<sup>57</sup> However, the single-minded emphasis upon the continuity between Christian anti-Judaism is also a disadvantage: it results in an over-simplistic reading of both historical anti-Judaism and the Holocaust. Ruether acknowledges that Christian anti-Judaism has its context within a paradox of reprobation and preservation. In concentrating on the tradition of reprobation to the all but total exclusion of that of preservation, she glosses over the gulf separating traditional Christian anti-Judaism and the modern anti-Semitism that culminated in the Holocaust. In conferring a legally recognised, albeit reprobate status upon the Jews, the Christian authorities ensured their survival. This conferral of legality stood in stark contrast to the authorities' attitude to heretical groups within Christianity. It was the Christian preservation of the limited, but legally recognised, rights of the Jewish community that provided the basis for

Jewish survival within Christendom. The Nuremberg Laws denied the Jews any such rights.

To acknowledge the "positive" elements within Christian anti-Judaism is not to minimise the Church's culpability with regard to the Holocaust. However, the fact that Christian theology did **not** envisage the widespread extermination of the Jews remains significant; even more so, if Ruether's contention that such a vision constitutes the logical outcome of the **Adversus Judaeos** tradition<sup>is accepted</sup>. For all the verbal and social vilification of the Jews, the Church stopped short of supporting either a systematic policy of forced conversion or annihilation. The "unrelieved blackness" of Ruether's presentation of Christianity's anti-Judaic record serves to support her rejection of traditional theology and ecclesiastical authority as irrevocably corrupt: a religious tradition that culminates in the Holocaust is an unworthy basis of modern belief and praxis. Thus, she never addresses the question as to whether it is possible to formulate a Christian theology, on the basis of the New Testament and within the tradition, that is not anti-Judaic. As a result, the negative critique of Christian anti-Judaism remains valid, whereas her positive suggestions for the reformulation of theology only have appeal for those prepared to dispense with classical Christianity.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'The Development of My Theology', 1.
2. Rosemary Radford Ruether, **Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology**, London: SCM, 1983, 16-7.
3. Ibid. 15-6.
4. Ibid. 24.
5. Ibid. 3.
6. Ibid. 12.
7. Ibid. 28.
8. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, **In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins**, London: SCM, 1983, 105-59.
9. John Gager suggests that Ruether and her New Testament critics substantially agree, but differ over the interpretation of detail, John G. Gager, **The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity**, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, 24-34, 24-5. To support Gager's claim, see the essays by Douglas Hare, Lloyd Gaston, and John Townsend, in ed. Davies, **Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity**.
10. Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi, 'The Socialist Feminist Vision of Rosemary Radford Ruether', 6.
11. Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Anti-Semitism and Christian Theology', in ed. Fleischner, **Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?**, 79-92, 82.
12. Franklin Littell, **The Crucifixion of the Jews: The Failure of Christians to Understand the Jewish Experience**, (1975), Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1986, 24.
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8. JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN: A POST-HOLOCAUST THEOLOGIA CRUCIS?

8. 1. INTRODUCTION.

8. 2. THE CRUCIFIED GOD.

8. 3. THEOLOGIA CRUCIS AND THE HISTORY OF SUFFERING.

8. 4. MOLTSMANN'S APPROPRIATION OF NIGHT

8. 5. THE FATE OF THE CROSS AS SYMBOL.

8. 1. INTRODUCTION.

As a German, protestant, theologian, Jürgen Moltmann approaches the Holocaust from a perspective substantially different to that of Rosemary Radford Ruether. Whereas, Ruether's professional interest in theology was aroused by the events surrounding Vatican II and the American civil rights movement, Moltmann dates his interest in theology to the Allied bombing of his home town, Hamburg, in July 1943, and his experience as a prisoner of war (February 1945-April 1948). Ruether's writing on Christian anti-Judaism forms part of a more general critique of hierarchical belief and practice. Moltmann's emphasis on the need to articulate a post-Holocaust theology arises from a consciousness of individual and collective, German "experiences of guilt and suffering".<sup>1</sup> Such experiences take two forms. First, the experience of the German people in rebuilding their nation under Allied occupation, in the aftermath of defeat. Moltmann cites the disillusionment of his generation; returning from prisoner of war camps, convinced that they had been sacrificed by the Nazi leadership: they were sent to fight when the war was already lost. Second, he asserts that guilt and alienation emerge as a consequence of Germany's "unmastered past" (the refusal to acknowledge the degree of popular support for the Nazi régime and its actions). The temptation is to confine the attribution of guilt to the Nazi hierarchy: the majority were obeying the orders of the legally constituted government; responsibility therefore belongs to the government, rather than to the population as a whole. Film of Nazi atrocities was dismissed by many Germans as Allied propaganda; and the war was viewed as a

tragedy for both Germany and Europe as a whole. Moltmann proceeds to identify the unmastered past" as the root cause of the disillusionment and alienation experienced by many of his contemporaries.<sup>2</sup>

Moltmann develops this reading of his contemporary situation by situating the specifically German experience of alienation within a more general context. He argues that the political hopes of the 1960's, generated as a result of the rise of civil rights movements in Czechoslovakia and the United States, faced a major challenge from the widespread disillusionment that followed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Moltmann's own experience, combined with this reading of the collective, postwar experience of the German people, and the setbacks encountered by the civil rights movements, profoundly influenced his transition from an emphasis upon the "theology of hope" to a theology of the Cross. In the light of the mass slaughter of the twentieth century (typified by Auschwitz and Hiroshima), theodicy is deemed to be the question facing Christian theology. In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann articulates a theology of the Cross, that he suggests *can* provide the foundations for a theological response to the question of theodicy, in the light of the atrocities of the twentieth century.

The key to *The Crucified God* lies in the assertion that Jesus' cry on the cross--"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"--encapsulates both the question of theodicy and the essential content of Christian faith.<sup>3</sup> The Cry of Dereliction encapsulates the anguish of the believer or righteous man confronted by God's silence in the face of innocent suffering. Moltmann suggests that in interpreting Jesus' cry in this way, he resolves the distinction between theism and atheism, by incorporating the anguish of the protest atheist within a non-theistic understanding of the suffering God. Understood as an event between God and God, the forsakenness encapsulated in the

Cry of Dereliction constitutes the "torment of hell"<sup>4</sup>, and thus serves to encapsulate the "depths and abysses of human history" that generate the problem of theodicy.<sup>5</sup>

Moltmann relies upon the theology of the Cross to provide the basis for both a formal and a practical response to the question of theodicy. However, a recurrent criticism of **The Crucified God** is that it emphasises the former at the expense of the latter. Moltmann articulates a formal, theological response to the problem of theodicy, but fails to relate this convincingly to the concrete situation of the individual sufferer. This criticism is particularly relevant in the context of his discussion of the Holocaust. Moltmann claims to be writing a theology in response to the events of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. However, does he refer to the Holocaust as a specific, historical event (as experienced by its victims), or as a general illustration of twentieth century inhumanity to man? If the Holocaust fulfils a purely illustrative function in Moltmann's theology, then this would serve to explain his apparent insensitivity to the historical reality of the event; an insensitivity that is all the more incongruous in view of the emphasis he places upon the impact of the Holocaust on his personal faith. This failure to engage with the specificity of the Holocaust is particularly apparent in the uncritical attitude adopted toward the appropriation of the child-hanging scene from **Night**, and the Cross as a determinative symbol of redemptive suffering. Although he acknowledges the long history of Christian anti-Judaism, Moltmann fails to incorporate this insight into his theology.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it can be argued that **The Crucified God** in effect constitutes pre-Holocaust theology in a post-Holocaust form.

#### 8. 2. THE CRUCIFIED GOD:

All Christian theology and all Christian life is basically an answer to the question which Jesus asked as he died. The atheism of protests and of metaphysical rebellions against God are also answers to this question. Either Jesus who was abandoned by God is the end of all theology or he is the

beginning of a specifically Christian, and therefore critical and liberating, theology and life.<sup>7</sup>

Moltmann begins his reformulation of Christian theology with the question that Ruether is reluctant to pose, let alone answer: what was it about the life and death of Jesus that set him apart from other contemporary teachers and martyrs? He responds by asserting that uniqueness lies in the godforsakenness of Jesus on the cross, encapsulated in the Cry of Dereliction. Jesus' death was an event between God and God, and in the context of his life and message, constituted the "torment of hell". As the "torment of hell", Jesus' death on the Cross encapsulates the problem of theodicy, and thus provides an answer to the question that dominates both theism and protest atheism. A theology of the Cross thus transcends the alternatives of theism and atheism.

Moltmann acknowledges that it is essential for a Christian theology to differentiate between the death of Jesus of the Cross and that of a wise man and teacher (Socrates or Rabbi Akiba), or a political insurgent (the Zealots). Whereas, Plato portrays Socrates' death as a "festival of liberty", and the Zealots died "conscious of their righteousness in the sight of God and looked forward to their resurrection to eternal life"<sup>8</sup>, Jesus was "greatly distressed and troubled" (Mk. 14:33), with "loud cries and tears" (Heb. 5:7), and died with "a loud cry" (Mk. 15:37). Jesus' distress before his death culminates in the cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). Thus, the earliest portrayal of Jesus' death differs substantially from that of the traditional heroic martyr: Jesus died "with every expression of the most profound horror".<sup>9</sup>

This "profound horror" can only be understood if Jesus' death is interpreted within the context of his relationship to God. **The Crucified God** rests on "the assumption that Jesus died with the signs and expressions of a profound abandonment by God."<sup>10</sup> This sense of "profound abandonment" derives its uniqueness from the

closeness of his relationship to God. Jesus' ministry and message rested upon his consciousness of an unprecedented closeness with God. Thus, his death on the Cross stands as radical counter-testimony to this belief:

anyone who lived and preached so close to God, his kingdom and his grace, and associated the decision of faith with his own person, could not regard his being handed over to death on the cross as one accursed as a mere mishap, a human misunderstanding or a final trial, but was bound to experience it as rejection by the very God whom he had dared to call 'My Father'.<sup>11</sup>

It is in the theological context of the relationship between Father and Son that Jesus' godforsakenness on the Cross constitutes the "torment of hell".

In interpreting the Cross as an event between Father and Son, Moltmann places it within a trinitarian context. The Father abandons the Son; the Son is abandoned by the Father. The Father suffers out of love for the Son; the Son experiences the radical negation of his proclamation of the closeness of God. Father and Son are "totally separated by the abandonment of Jesus and at the same time intimately united in surrender."<sup>12</sup> As an expression of Jesus' "unique abandonment by God"<sup>13</sup>, the Cry of Dereliction encapsulates all experiences of abandonment and godforsakenness: Jesus cries out against the God who appears to be absent on behalf of all innocent sufferers. As an event within the trinity --God against God--the Cross attains representative status:

God (himself) suffered in Jesus, God himself died in Jesus for us. God is on the cross of Jesus 'for us', and through that becomes God and Father of the godless and the godforsaken.<sup>14</sup>

The unique abandonment of the Son by the Father, and extreme forsakenness experienced by the Father at the loss of His Son, incorporate all the "depths and abysses of human history". Thus, on the basis of this double experience of forsakenness, God becomes the "God and Father of the godless and godforsaken", sharing the victim's anguish.<sup>15</sup>

Moltmann elaborates his understanding of the representative function of the Cross in the context of an analysis of theism and atheism. He argues that theism runs counter to Christian understanding of the Cross. Theism asserts that God is impassible. However, such an assertion runs counter to Moltmann's interpretation of the Cross:

God cannot suffer, God cannot die, says theism, in order to bring suffering, mortal being under his protection. God suffered in the suffering of Jesus, God died on the cross of Christ, says Christian faith, so that we might live and rise again in his future.<sup>16</sup>

Impassibility is incompatible with the reading of the Cross as a trinitarian event, in which God suffers as both Father and Son. In Moltmann's theology, God is identified with love (1 John 4: 16), and the capacity to love is identified with the capacity to suffer. Thus, a theistic concept of God is to be rejected: a God who cannot suffer is a God who cannot love.<sup>16</sup>

Atheism, in the form of metaphysical rebellion, arises as a protest against the theistic divine order:

it is the means by which a man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it disputes the ends of man and creation.<sup>17</sup>

The protest atheist's concern is with the righteousness of a God who appears to countenance innocent suffering. Moltmann argues that such a critique is valid when directed against the theistic concept of an impassible God: the theistic God is unaffected by suffering, and is thus both incapable and unworthy of love.<sup>18</sup>

Moltmann concludes that a trinitarian concept of God rooted in the Cross transcends the dispute between theism and atheism, recognising the limitations of both:

A radical theology of the cross cannot give any theistic answer to the question of the dying Christ. Were it to do so it would evacuate the cross. Nor can it give an atheistic answer. Were it to do so it would no longer be taking Jesus' death cry to God seriously. The God of theism cannot have abandoned him, and in his forsakenness he cannot have cried out to a non-existent God.<sup>19</sup>



It is essential to Moltmann's argument that the ability of God to suffer, both in himself and alongside humanity, offers "the only way past" protest theism: the complaint of Ivan Karamazov or Albert Camus is unanswerable. However, on the Cross, God takes up and incorporates this protest. God and suffering are no longer contradictory realities: God is in suffering and suffering is in God.<sup>20</sup> The inherent problem with this entire strategy lies in Moltmann's failure to provide a convincing explanation of why his theology of the Cross offers a resolution of protest atheism by situating suffering "in God".

### 8. 3. THEOLOGIA CRUCIS AND THE HISTORY OF SUFFERING:

As in the case of Rosemary Ruether, Moltmann acknowledges that a Christian resolution of the problem of evil, rooted in the Cross and Resurrection, faces a critical challenge from the fact that the world remains unredeemed. However, unlike Ruether, he does not consider the unredeemed status of the world to be incompatible with the "once and for all" status of the Cross-Resurrection as the overcoming of evil and the beginning of a new creation. The Cross is a "once and for all" event, but the promised new creation remains in the future, when the world will be redeemed. The certain promise of the new creation, on the basis of the trinitarian event of the Cross, gives "courage to be" in the face of continuing suffering in the present. Moltmann's analysis of the theology of the Cross as the basis for a resolution of the problem evil has attracted one recurrent criticism: he provides a primarily theoretical response to a practical problem. What justification is there for his assertion that such an analysis of the Cross provides "courage to be" in the context of the counter-testimony of an unredeemed world?

Moltmann acknowledges that, despite the Cross, the problem of evil remains unresolved as long as the world is unredeemed. This resolution can only come with a new creation:

only with the resurrection of the dead, the murdered and the gassed, only with the healing of those in despair who bear lifelong wounds, only with the

abolition of all rule and authority, only with the annihilation of death will the Son hand over the kingdom to the Father. Then God will turn his sorrow into eternal joy.<sup>21</sup>

The knowledge that, on the Cross, God suffered and died "for us", provides the believer with the "courage to be" in the face of "nothingness and all annihilating experiences"<sup>22</sup>, in the interim period between the "provisional finality" of the Church in the present and the "fulfilment of the kingdom" in the new creation of the future. The new creation suggested by the Resurrection of Jesus belongs to the "language of promise", rather than to the "language of facts". Moltmann's assertion that the theology of the Cross resolves the problem of evil thus relies upon "eschatological verification".<sup>23</sup>

It is ironic that, despite claiming that a trinitarian theology of the Cross transcends protest atheism, Moltmann lays himself open to one of its major criticisms of religious belief--the morality of an appeal to eschatological verification. He cites Ivan Karamazov's rejection of eschatological verification as the "classical form of protest atheism":

I don't want harmony. I don't want it out of the love I bear to mankind. I want to remain with my suffering unavenged and my indignation unappeased, **even if I were wrong**. Besides, too high a price has been placed on harmony. We cannot afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore I hasten to return my ticket of admission. And indeed if I am an honest man, I'm bound to hand it back as soon as possible. This I am doing. It is not God that I do not accept, Alyosha, I merely most respectfully return him the ticket.<sup>24</sup>

Moltmann cites Ivan's critique as part of an analysis of theism and atheism; an analysis that is intended to support his reformulation of the theology of the Cross. He asserts that the Cry of Desolation encapsulates the cries of all those who call out to God for justice. Understood as an event between God and God, the Cross incorporates the anguish of all who experience suffering and loss: the metaphysical rebellion of Ivan Karamazov is taken up into the Godhead.

However, is such a manoeuvre legitimate? The essence of Ivan's critique lies in the rejection of a future harmony, on the grounds that it commands "too high a price". Moltmann's theology, despite its adoption of the language of protest atheism, relies upon precisely such an appeal. It is not the presence of suffering "in God" that underpins his response to the problem of evil, but the promise of a new creation on the basis of the Cross as a "once and for all" event between God and God. Without the promised new creation, the question of theodicy "remains open".<sup>25</sup> Ivan Karamazov may give voice to an anguish analogous to that expressed in the Cry of Dereliction, but it is an anguish that arises from his inability to accept precisely the kind of new creation envisaged by Moltmann:

if the sufferings of children go to make up the sum of sufferings which is necessary for the purchase of truth, then I say beforehand that the entire truth is not worth such a price.<sup>26</sup>

Ironically, Moltmann's position is similar to that postulated by Ivan's novitiate brother, Alyosha. Alyosha shares Ivan's anguish, but argues that the justice of a future harmony rests on the fact that the Son:

can forgive everything, everyone and everything and **for everything**, because he gave his innocent blood for all and for everything....it is on him that the edifice is founded,<sup>27</sup>

Ivan's rejection of Alyosha's suggestion is found in the parable of the Grand Inquisitor.<sup>28</sup> Thus, a theology of the Cross fails to provide an answer or incorporate the metaphysical rebellion of the protest atheist. Instead, Moltmann's attempt to incorporate protest atheism serves to undercut his theology of the Cross: protest atheism questions the morality of the new creation that underpins the resolution of the problem of evil.

Moltmann's analysis of protest atheism serves to highlight a second difficulty with his approach. He notes that Ivan Karamazov is protesting against speculative theodicies in the face of the anguish generated by innocent suffering. Hence, the insistence that a theology of the Cross reflect the moral anguish and outrage of the

protest atheist: it is essential to avoid abstraction by remembering the concrete detail of human suffering. However, does not the location of suffering within the Godhead serve to generate abstraction? Rebecca Chopp suggests that theodicy is primarily a speculative theological problem:

For Moltmann, suffering is, first, the question of the appropriate concept of God. Moltmann can offer ... an answer to the question of suffering by making God the measure and context of all suffering. God's suffering--more ultimate than any human suffering--can be understood and responded to only in faith: faith sees the glory of the triune God in the faces and cries of the oppressed.<sup>29</sup>

Such an analysis presents a distorted picture of Moltmann's theological strategy. Suffering is primarily "the question of the appropriate concept of God". However, he is convinced that in correcting the misconceptions of theism and "making God the measure and context of all suffering", he is paving the way for a practical response to the problem of evil. His theological strategy is rooted in the quest for a faith capable of countering the disillusionment experienced by his own generation. Such a faith requires firm theological foundations; foundations Moltmann strives to provide through his analysis of the godforsakenness of Jesus on the Cross. The protest atheist has successfully critiqued theism. It is thus necessary to reformulate Christian theology on a non-theistic basis, in order to offer a convincing response to the anguish of the believer.

The practical efficacy of Moltmann's theological response to the problem of evil rests upon the assertion that:

Every person damned and forsaken by God can, in the crucified one, experience community with God.<sup>30</sup>

The experience of "community with God" gives "courage to be" in a situation of "godforsakenness and hopelessness".<sup>31</sup> However, is there any justification for this assertion? Moltmann asserts that "nothingness and all annihilating experiences" have been taken up into the "trinitarian history of God". Carl Braaten suggests that

it is more logical to regard such experiences as irreducible counter-testimony to the Christian promise. To do otherwise is to minimise the negative experience of suffering:

Those who cry out from the graveyards of death make it seem rather that history is left with an open wound that has not yet been closed. I think Moltmann has fallen for a speculative theodicy and ... thus into a mystification of history....so that in spite of Auschwitz and Vietnam, God will be all in all.<sup>32</sup>

Again, it is possible to accuse Moltmann's critic of misrepresenting his position. He does not deny that history is left with an "open wound", but insists that until this wound is healed in the new creation (when God will be "all in all"), the believer derives "courage to be" from the experience of "community with God". However, having registered this caveat, Braaten is correct in noting the danger of "mystification" inherent in Moltmann's approach. Is not the emphasis upon "community with God" giving "courage to be" élitist: it privileges those capable of maintaining faith in the face of "nothingness and all annihilating experiences"? Is "community with God" dependent on the individual consciously experiencing it; or is God present in an individual's godforsakenness regardless of whether His presence is recognised? What of those victims who are so dehumanised as to be unconscious of their status as subjects, as in the case of the **Muselmänner**? For Braaten and Chopp, Moltmann's reformulated theology of the Cross is incapable of incorporating the experience of the Holocaust, as encapsulated by the figure of the **Muselmann**.

Moltmann's German contemporary, Johann Baptist Metz identifies the root of the problem as the lack of clear demarcation between a theological response to the problem of evil (the analysis of the godforsakenness of Jesus on the Cross as the "torment of hell"), and the reality of suffering (the application of this theological analysis to the Holocaust):

Whenever one tries to relate the history of redemption completed in Jesus Christ to the human history of suffering, not just by juxtaposing them

in a historical paradox (so that one is **sub contrario** asserted to be in the other), but to understand the alienation of the history of suffering itself as within the dialectics of the Trinitarian history of God, what occurs is a confusion between the negativity of suffering and the negativity of the dialectically mediated concept of suffering.<sup>33</sup>

Moltmann's failure to clarify this distinction results in an inherent confusion within **The Crucified God** between a theological interpretation of suffering and the reality of that suffering in itself. The result of this confusion is either a "dualistic eternalization of suffering" (the problem remains but is now internal to the Trinity, rather than external in the world. Does alienation become an intrinsic characteristic or attribute of the Godhead?), or a "condescending reduction of suffering to its concept" (the problem of evil is resolved with no reference to the experience of the individual sufferer).<sup>34</sup> Metz' analysis is born out by an examination of Moltmann's specific treatment of the Holocaust through his usage of the child-hanging scene in **Night**.

#### 8. 4. MOLTMANN'S APPROPRIATION OF NIGHT:

Moltmann's appropriation of the child-hanging scene from **Night** as "a shattering expression of the theologia crucis"<sup>35</sup> has aroused a great deal of controversy in Christian circles. The citation of **Night** occurs in the climactic section of **The Crucified God**: "The Experience of Human Life in the Pathos of God", in the chapter "The 'Crucified God'".<sup>36</sup> Controversy centres on the appropriateness of using such a passage in this particular context. Criticism varies from describing such a usage as blasphemy (Roy Eckardt) to theologically inappropriate (Johann Baptist Metz).

For Moltmann, Elie Wiesel's description of the public hanging of a child in Auschwitz provides "a shattering expression of the theologia crucis". He acknowledges that such an interpretation does not reflect the passage's original intent, but argues that it is justified :

it is true in a real, transferred sense, that God himself hung on the gallows, as E. Wiesel was able

to say. If that is taken seriously, it must also be said that, like the cross of Christ, even Auschwitz is in God himself.<sup>37</sup>

Moltmann identifies the agony depicted in **Night** with that of Jesus on the Cross. On the basis of his interpretation of the Cross as the encapsulation<sup>of</sup> "nothingness and all annihilating experiences", he asserts that "even Auschwitz is in God himself"; Auschwitz is taken up into "the grief of the Father, the surrender of the Son and the power of the Spirit".<sup>38</sup> Thus, the God hanging on the gallows at Auschwitz is identified with the "Crucified God".

The crucial question is whether such a Christian theological identification of God is legitimate. Moltmann's most extreme critic, the American theologian, Roy Eckardt, argues that such an identification is "blasphemy" in the context of the Holocaust.<sup>39</sup> He questions the appropriateness of Moltmann's appropriation of **Night** in support of a *theologia crucis*, and suggests that such a usage smacks of Christian triumphalism. In citing the child-hanging scene from **Night**, Moltmann responds to the statement, "Where is he? He is here. He is hanging here on the gallows...", by commenting:

Any other answer would be blasphemy. There cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of this torment. To speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon.<sup>40</sup>

However, Eckardt challenges the appropriateness of such a comment:

why has the word "Christian" been inserted here? The sufferer was a Jew. Further, the voice giving the answer is that of a Jew.<sup>41</sup>

He accuses Moltmann of ignoring both the fact that the victims of the Holocaust were predominantly Jewish (**Night** being Wiesel's memoir of the **Jewish** suffering in Auschwitz), and the historical culpability of the Church for generating an atmosphere and environment in which the extermination of the Jews could occur with little or no opposition. In the light of the Church's record, ably demonstrated by Rosemary Ruether, the appropriation of **Night** in support of a theology of the Cross can be

interpreted as a continuation of Christian triumphalism: a Christian theologian is appropriating a Jew's religious response to a specific instance of Jewish suffering for a purpose that is totally alien to the author's own understanding. Eckardt is prepared to concede such implicit triumphalism is unintentional on Moltmann's part, but argues that it is present nevertheless.

Eckardt concludes his analysis by accusing Moltmann of gross insensitivity in his handling of the Holocaust. The insensitivity of the appropriation of *Night* in support of a theology of the Cross is compounded by the placement of this analysis immediately preceding the subsection, "The fullness of life in the trinitarian history of God":

It is sad that Moltmann says these things **at this place** in his study. We plead only for the dead children, women, and men who could never accept such propositions as those ... cited....At this juncture, Moltmann's eyes are closed to a simple fact: those who were murdered at Auschwitz were representative (willing or unwilling) of a view he directly criticizes.<sup>41</sup>

It is the appropriation of *Night* within the context of a discussion of the "trinitarian history of God" that convinces Eckardt that latent Christian triumphalism is running through *The Crucified God*.

In defending Moltmann's usage of *Night*, Richard Bauckham brusquely dismisses Eckardt's criticisms as "exaggerated".<sup>42</sup> He argues that the Cross, as the encapsulation of the problem of suffering, is analogous to the Holocaust and thus provides the basis for a religious response:

This reinterpretation is justified in the light of the cross, which would be enough to end faith in God, were it not seen as God's presence precisely in abandonment by God. Hence, in Auschwitz, as on the cross, God is present in His own contradiction.<sup>43</sup>

However, Bauckham is merely repeating Moltmann's failure to distinguish between the concept of suffering as a theological problem, and the reality of suffering as experienced by the victims. An appeal to Jesus' godforsakenness on the Cross may provide a convincing



response to the Holocaust for Bauckham as a Christian theologian. For other Christian theologians, such as Braaten or Chopp, such an appeal entails a dangerous mystification of the historical suffering of the Jews (as symbolised by the passage from **Night**). In view of the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism, the arguments of both Bauckham and Moltmann seem curiously naive. Moltmann does not appear to have anticipated that the appropriation of **Night**, within the context of a trinitarian theology of the Cross, would generate such controversy: he moves directly from a citation of the child-hanging scene to a defence of his trinitarian reading of the Cross, without any qualifying reference to the passage's original context or purpose. Bauckham's defence fails to engage with the central issue: the propriety of a Christian theological identification of God in the Holocaust, in the light of the history of Christian anti-Judaism.

Johann Baptist Metz elaborates upon this question of propriety. His analysis of the appropriate Christian response to the child-hanging scene echoes Eckardt's concern. Both agree that the key question is **who** has the right to respond to the question posed by Wiesel. However, whereas Eckardt simply asserts that this right is confined to the Jews, Metz offers a more systematic defence of this claim:

**Who** really has the right to give the answer to the God-question--'Where is God? Here he is--he hangs on the gallows?' As far as I am concerned, only the Jew threatened by death with all the children in Auschwitz has the right to say it--only he alone. There is no other identification of God....here as far as I am concerned, no Christian identification of God is possible. If at all, this can be done only by the Jew imprisoned together with his God in the abyss....Only he, I think, can alone speak of a 'God on the gallows', not we Christians outside of Auschwitz who sent the Jew into such a situation of despair or at least left him in it. Here, for me, there is no 'sense', to which we could testify without the Jew.<sup>44</sup>

In effect, Metz argues that a theoretical response to the problem of suffering (as posed by the Holocaust) can only be articulated by those who experienced the historical

reality in question. This category could be extended to incorporate all Jews, if one accepts Emil Fackenheim's definition of a Jew as anyone who would have been defined as Jewish under the Nuremberg Laws. Christians are "outside", having "sent the Jew into such a situation of despair or at least left him in it.". Thus, it is the Christian history of anti-Judaism that illegitimizes any "Christian theological identification of God". Such an identification can only come from "the Jew imprisoned together with his God in the abyss".

However, how are Christians to respond to Auschwitz if a theological identification of God is the prerogative of the Jew? Metz suggests that the answer lies in a recognition of this state of dependence:

We will ... forego the temptation to interpret the suffering of the Jewish people from our standpoint, in terms of saving history. Under no circumstances is it **our** task to mystify this suffering! We encounter in this suffering first of all the riddle of our own lack of feeling, not, however, the traces of God.<sup>45</sup>

If Metz' suggestion is adopted, then Christian theology's initial response to the Holocaust is to acknowledge its own culpability, in the form of the history of Christian anti-Judaism (hence the seminal importance of **Faith and Fratricide**). The acknowledgement of this history brings the recognition of Christianity's position "outside" the Holocaust, and its subsequent dependency upon Jewish religious responses. Moltmann's apparent insensitivity arises as a result of his failure to acknowledge this state of dependency; a failure that constitutes the major difference between the work of Metz, and American theologians, such as Eckardt, Littell, and Ruether, and that of Bauckham and Moltmann. The latter are aware of the history of Christian anti-Judaism, but fail to incorporate this awareness in their theological response to the Holocaust. By contrast, American responses are acutely conscious of the bearing a recognition of Christian anti-Judaism has upon the formulation of a response to the Holocaust. Moltmann's failure to recognise this state of

dependency can be illustrated through his non-critical attitude towards the status of the Cross as symbol.

#### 8. 5. THE FATE OF THE CROSS AS SYMBOL:

There are two elements in an analysis of the post-Holocaust status of the Cross as symbol: the Cross as a symbol of Christian anti-Judaism; and the interpretation of the Cross as the determinative symbol of redemptive suffering. Again, Moltmann's severest critic is Roy Eckardt.

Eckardt notes that the very title, *The Crucified God*, has unfortunate, albeit unintentional, echoes of the deicide charge.<sup>46</sup> Moltmann presents the Cross as the ultimate in godforsakenness, seemingly oblivious to the way this symbol has been perceived by those outside the Christian tradition. Whereas, for Moltmann, the Cross is a symbol of love; Wiesel notes that for Jews, it is a symbol of "torment and terror"--the symbol of Christian anti-Judaism.<sup>47</sup> Eckardt suggests that the former interpretation cannot be totally disassociated from the latter: the fact that the Cross has come to be associated with persecution necessarily affects its positive status as a symbol of love. In the light of Christian anti-Judaism, as typified by the charge of deicide, the Cross becomes a flawed symbol. Christian culpability for the Holocaust results in the irrevocable corruption of the symbolic value of the Cross:

The "crucified Christ" simply cannot be separated from what has happened to, and been done to, the cross....It was in and through the Holocaust that the symbol of the cross became ultimately corrupted by devilishness.<sup>48</sup>

In asserting that the Cross became "ultimately corrupted by devilishness" during the Holocaust, Eckardt articulates the logical conclusion of Ruether's statement that anti-Judaism is the "left-hand" of christology. If anti-Judaism is intrinsic to classical Christianity, and the Holocaust is interpreted as the logical outcome of such anti-Judaism, then the only way of "cleansing" theology is to move outside the tradition.

Thus, the validity of Eckardt's criticism depends upon acceptance of the twin assertions that anti-Judaism is intrinsic to Christianity, and the Holocaust represents the logical fulfilment of Christian teaching. As has been shown in the analysis of Ruether, the second of these assertions ignores the radically modern character of the Holocaust. The former assertion can be challenged by interpreting anti-Judaism as an aberration, albeit a deeply rooted one, rather than an intrinsic expression of the tradition. The Catholic theologian, Gregory Baum suggests that the appropriate response to Christian anti-Judaism is the regeneration of religious language via the recognition of the "deadly power of its own symbols".<sup>49</sup> Christian theologians must become more sensitive to the implications of their own religious language through awareness of the negative side of Christianity's history. The criteria for such a reappraisal are provided by the positive content of the gospel. The Church's language and actions, both historically and in the present, are judged on the basis of their compatibility with the positive claims of Christianity:

the attempt to free the Christian religion from ideological deformations, especially from the anti-Jewish thrust, is based on the ... profound conviction that what God has revealed in Jesus Christ cannot contain symbols of domination against any group of people. It is this faith in the Divine nature of the Christian message that enables Christians to question some traditional formulations of their faith and to live with some unresolved problems in the present.<sup>50</sup>

The identification of the positive themes in the Christian faith becomes the basis for a critique its negative content. Thus, such a critique is internal, rather than external. The purging of negative elements, such as Christian anti-Judaism, does not necessitate the rejection of the tradition: the criteria for this purge are also located within the tradition.

Eckardt is correct in noting Moltmann's uncritical use of the symbol of the Cross. However, he is incorrect in asserting that, as a consequence of its association

with Christian anti-Judaism, the Cross is "ultimately corrupted by devilishness". The Crucified God would constitute a legitimate Christian response to the Holocaust if it incorporated a sensitivity towards the "deadly power" of the negative symbolism of the Cross.

The second line of criticism adopted by Eckardt concerns the status of the Cross as a determinative symbol of redemptive suffering. He challenges Moltmann's claim that Jesus' suffering on the Cross was unique and constituted the "torment of hell": in the context of the suffering of the Holocaust (particularly that of the one million children), that of Jesus is "non-decisive" and "fades into comparative moral triviality". Whereas, Jesus was "at least a grown, mature man, and by all the evidence a courageous one", who consciously followed a path that resulted in his crucifixion, the one million children who died during the Holocaust were innocent victims who died simply because they were Jewish under Nazi law.<sup>51</sup> As a consequence:

the crucifixion is deprived of its redemptiveness. All that remains upon the hill of Golgotha is unmitigated evil. After Auschwitz, the crucifixion cannot be accepted as a determinative symbol of redemptive suffering.<sup>52</sup>

The positive symbol of the Cross is supplanted by the counter-testimony of Auschwitz.

In denying that Jesus' suffering on the Cross is the "torment of hell", Eckardt ignores Moltmann's insistence that this claim is based on theological criteria. Jesus' death differs from that of the zealot or righteous man only because of his experience of godforsakenness; an experience that is unique because of the relationship between Father and Son. Thus, an implicit parallel is drawn between the physical suffering of Jesus and that of the zealot or righteous man. Moltmann is emphatic that Jesus' godforsakenness is only unique in a theological sense, as an event between God and God. Such a definition of uniqueness is unaffected by historical experiences of godforsakenness: the latter are not events between God and

God. The godforsakenness of the Holocaust challenges the assertion that all who cry out to God echo the Cry of Dereliction; and the affirmation that "Auschwitz is in God himself". It does not affect Moltmann's claim that the Cross is a unique, inter-trinitarian event.

Eckardt is open to the same criticism as that levelled at Moltmann: he fails to differentiate clearly between the historical reality of suffering and its theological interpretation. In contrasting the fate of Jesus with that of the children who died in Auschwitz, Eckardt is drawing a historical analogy (as illustrated by the reference to Jesus' age and courage). By contrast, in supplanting the redemptiveness of the Cross with the "unmitigated evil" of Auschwitz, he is offering a theological definition of uniqueness similar to that central to Moltmann's thesis: the suffering of children in Auschwitz is the "torment of hell". However, such a definition requires its own positive theological context. For instance, it might be argued that the suffering of Auschwitz constitutes the "torment of hell" in the light of God's covenantal promise to protect His Chosen People. Eckardt's statement is meaningless without such a supporting framework: it rests upon a failure to differentiate between historical suffering and the theological interpretation of that suffering.

#### CONCLUSION:

Moltmann is struggling courageously to create a post-Holocaust theology. Yet he cannot escape the fact that **The Crucified God** comprises, in essence, pre-Holocaust thinking.<sup>53</sup>

In 'Forgiveness and Politics: Forty Years after the Stuttgart Confession', Moltmann offers a detailed analysis of the reluctance of the German Protestant Churches to acknowledge their guilt, both in terms of their failure to offer widespread resistance to the Nazi régime, and the role Christian anti-Judaism played in paving the way for the Holocaust. However, he never considers the repercussions that such an analysis might have for a Christian theological response to the Holocaust, such as

**The Crucified God.** He notes the "good but lamentably disputed" resolution of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland (1980):

We confess with deep concern the shared responsibility and guilt of Christians in Germany for the Holocaust ... Disregard for the abiding election of Israel and condemnation of it to non-existence have always characterised Christian theology, the Church's preaching, and the Church's actions up to the present day. Through this we too have made ourselves guilty of the physical extinction of the Jewish people.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, the New Testament exegesis in **The Crucified God** reflects little of the same sensitivity. Moltmann employs many of the stereotypes Ruether deems characteristic of Christian anti-Judaism: Jesus preaches a "scandalous message", challenging the "God of the law" of the Judaism of his day;<sup>55</sup> his ministry provokes "a contest between the gospel and the law, between the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of works"<sup>56</sup>; the crucifixion is "a necessary consequence of his conflict with the law".<sup>57</sup>

Richard Bauckham disputes the suggestion that this exegesis is "potentially anti-Semitic" by pointing to the accompanying positive references to the Jews.<sup>58</sup> However, in doing so, he misses the point. Moltmann's exegesis and theology are open to criticism because he repeats the stereotypes of pre-Holocaust theology; stereotypes that have contributed to the history of Christian anti-Judaism.<sup>59</sup> The presence of such stereotypes despite his sensitivity towards the German Churches' historical record, both long and short-term, serves to emphasise how deep-rooted such language is within the tradition, and how deep the need for an internal reformulation of Christian religious language. Moltmann is being criticised precisely because of his insensitivity to the resonance of the exegetical language he employs; an insensitivity that is all the more surprising in view of his sensitivity to the Church's historical record of anti-Judaism.

There are two possible, interconnected reasons for this inconsistent treatment of the Holocaust. First, Moltmann is not engaged in formulating a response to the

Holocaust per se. He is formulating a response to the Holocaust as the symbol of the problem of evil in the late twentieth century. Moltmann is unwilling to grant the event a unique status: it is one, albeit radical, illustration of man's inhumanity to man. The lack of clarity in *The Crucified God* between the interpretation of suffering and the historical reality of that suffering is paralleled by a blurring of the distinction between the Holocaust as a symbol of radical political evil ("Auschwitz") and the historical reality of the Holocaust (the child-hanging scene in *Night*). In referring to the child-hanging scene as "a shattering expression of theologia crucis", Moltmann is offering a theological mystification of a historical event. Such a mystification is only valid if offered by the victims or those who experienced the event. To appropriate the scene for the purpose of a theology of the Cross is both to deny the victims' particularity, and to ignore Christianity's position on the "outside" of the Holocaust.

Second, Moltmann offers an inconsistent reading of covenantal history. In reformulating the covenant in the light of the counter-testimony of the Cross, he is employing a traditional reading of history. However, the interpretation of the Cross as a "once and for all" event results in the suspension of the reading of covenantal history as a dialectic of promise and counter-testimony: in Moltmann's theology, historical events no longer act as counter-testimony forcing the reformulation of belief; they are incorporated within the trinitarian history of God. The complaint of the protest atheist remains valid: God may be affected by the suffering in history, but that suffering is not allowed to impinge upon Moltmann's concept of God. His theodicy remains intact because history is no longer allowed to fulfil its function as counter-testimony. Thus, for all the emotive language employed, Moltmann's theology parallels theism both in its reliance upon eschatological verification and the refusal to admit the existence of radical counter-testimony.



FOOTNOTES:

1. Jürgen Moltmann, 'Foreword' in Bauckham, **Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making**, vii-x, viii.
2. For a more detailed account of Moltmann's interpretation of German responses to the Second World War, see: Jürgen Moltmann, 'Forgiveness and Politics: Forty Years after the Stuttgart Confession', **Forgiveness and Study Project**, Case Study 2, London: New World Publications, 1987, 40-52, 41-5; Moltmann, 'Foreword', vii-viii.
3. Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 145-53.
4. Ibid. 148.
5. Ibid. 246.
6. Moltmann, 'Forgiveness and Politics', 48.
7. Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 4.
8. Ibid. 145-7.
9. Ibid. 146.
10. Ibid. 147.
11. Ibid. 147-8.
12. Jürgen Moltmann, 'The "Crucified God": A Trinitarian Theology of the Cross', **Interpretation**, 1972, 26, 278-99, 293.
13. Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 149.
14. Ibid. 192.
15. Ibid. 252.
16. Ibid. 253. On the question of the passibility of God, see: Richard Bauckham, 'Only the Suffering God Can Help: Divine Passibility in Modern Theology', **Themelios**, 1984, 9, 6-12; Warren McWilliams, 'Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology', **Scottish Journal of Theology**, 1980, 33, 35-53; Kenneth Surin, 'The Impassibility of God and the Problem of God', **Scottish Journal of Theology**, 1982, 35, 97-115.
17. Albert Camus, **The Rebel**, in Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 221.
18. Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 222-7.
19. Ibid. 225-7.
20. Ibid. 227.
21. Ibid. 278.
22. Ibid. 335.
23. Ibid. 173.
24. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, **The Brothers Karamazov**, 287; Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 220-1. Moltmann omits the words, "and my indignation unappeased, even if I were wrong", and adds the sentence, "I accept God,

understand that, but I cannot accept the world that he has made.".

25. Jürgen Moltmann, 'Theodicy', in eds. Alan Richardson and John Bowden, **A New Dictionary of Christian Theology**, London: SCM, 1983, 564-5, 565.
26. Dostoyevsky, **The Brothers Karamazov**, 287. See the complete discussion between Ivan and Alyosha, 'Rebellion', 276-88. Compare Ivan's vision of the new creation, 285-7, with Moltmann's, **The Crucified God**, 278.
27. Dostoyevsky, **The Brothers Karamazov**, 288.
28. Ibid. 288-309.
29. Rebecca S. Chopp, **The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies**, New York: Orbis Books, 1986, 115-6.
30. Moltmann, **The Experiment Hope**, 79.
31. Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 335.
32. Carl E. Braaten, 'A Trinitarian Theology of the Cross', **Journal of Religion**, 1976, 56, 113-21, 119.
33. Johann Baptist Metz, **Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Theology**, trans. David Smith, London: Burns & Oates, 1980, 132.
34. Ibid.
35. Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 273.
36. Ibid. 200-90, 267-78.
37. Ibid. 278.
38. Ibid.
39. Eckardt and Eckardt, **Long Night's Journey into Day**, 114.
40. Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 274.
41. A. Roy Eckardt, 'Jürgen Moltmann, the Jewish People, and the Holocaust', **Journal of the American Academy of Religion**, 1976, 44, 675-91, 684.
42. Bauckham, **Moltmann**, note 16, 154.
43. Bauckham, 'Theodicy from Ivan Karamazov to Moltmann', 94.
44. Johann Baptist Metz, 'Facing the Jews. Christian Theology after Auschwitz', in eds. Schüssler Fiorenza and Tracy, **The Holocaust as Interruption**, 26-33, 29-30.
45. Johann Baptist Metz, **The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World**, trans. Peter Mann, London: SCM, 1981, 11.
46. Eckardt, 'Jürgen Moltmann, the Jewish People, and the Holocaust', 677.
47. Wiesel, 'Art and Culture after the Holocaust', 406.

48. Eckardt, 'Jürgen Moltmann, the Jewish People, and the Holocaust', 685.
49. Gregory Baum, **Christian Theology After Auschwitz**, London: Council of Christians and Jews, 1976, 18.
50. Ibid. 13.
51. Eckardt, 'Jürgen Moltmann, the Jewish People, and the Holocaust', 687.
52. Ibid. 686.
53. Eckardt and Eckardt, **Long Night's Journey into Day**, 121.
54. Moltmann, 'Forgiveness and Politics, 48.
55. Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 127.
56. Ibid. 133.
57. Ibid. 132.
58. Bauckham, **Moltmann**, 73; Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 134-5.
59. For an analysis of the role played by these stereotypes in German biblical exegesis, see: Charlotte Klein, **Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology**, trans. Edward Quinn, London: SPCK, 1978.

9. JOHANN BAPTIST METZ: FACING THE JEWS.

9. 1. INTRODUCTION.

9. 2. CHRISTIANS AND JEWS AFTER AUSCHWITZ.

9. 3. BOURGEOIS OR MESSIANIC RELIGION?

9. 4. THE DESCENT INTO HELL: "ANTI-HISTORY" IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY.

9. 1. INTRODUCTION:

The preceding analysis of the work of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Jürgen Moltmann serves to highlight the leading criteria of a Christian response to the Holocaust. **Faith and Fratricide** has proved to be a seminal text: by conclusively demonstrating that anti-Judaism has persisted as a central theme in the Church's teaching down the ages, Ruether has succeeded in forcing the question of the nature of the relationship between Christianity and anti-Semitism onto the theological agenda. However, it is insufficient merely to acknowledge and repent of the Church's history of anti-Judaism.<sup>1</sup> **The Crucified God** remains controversial in spite of Moltmann's awareness of the Church's historical record, and his determination to articulate a post-Holocaust theology. The fundamental criticism levelled against him being that this historical sensitivity fails to penetrate his theology: he continues to employ the very theological stereotypes that permeate Christian anti-Judaism. Thus, Ruether is correct in identifying the self-critical reformulation of religious language as the key priority for any Christian response to the Holocaust. Awareness of the Church's historical record is insufficient, unless it generates a sensitivity towards the language and theological concepts that form the foundations of Christian anti-Judaism.

A second question then arises: does sensitivity to the history of anti-Judaism require the admission that it plays a central role in Christian theology, as the "left-hand" of Christology? Ruether's thesis has been challenged on the grounds that it is based upon a misreading of early

Christian origins. Anti-Judaism initially emerges in the context of the split between Church and Synagogue. It does not attain the developed form of the **Adversus Judaeos** tradition until after the conversion of Constantine, by which time the Church had become predominantly Gentile. The key question is thus whether the post-Constantinian tradition is merely continuous with previous anti-Judaism, or whether it marks a substantially new departure? If the emphasis is placed upon the continuity between the pre- and post-Constantinian tradition, then the eradication of anti-Judaism requires a fundamental break with traditional Christianity. If the emphasis is placed upon the elements of discontinuity, it becomes possible to reformulate the tradition, by cleansing it of the distortion of anti-Judaism.

Ruether adopts the first strategy, whereas Moltmann adopts the second. The difference between these two positions becomes apparent in the differing interpretations applied to a shared conviction that the Church is called to be a counterculture, challenging and disrupting society's prevailing values. Ruether argues that the Church can only fulfil this function from outside the mainstream of classical Christianity. The latter is interpreted as the epitome of the prevailing values of a predominantly hierarchical society. The definition of anti-Judaism as the "left-hand" of Christology reflects Ruether's conviction that Jesus' "original" message has been corrupted by the subsequent theology of the Church. The eradication of anti-Judaism thus requires a move back beyond traditional theology, and the "recovery" of Jesus' message. This "recovery" takes the form of a "new" faith based upon the religious experience of marginalised and oppressed groups; a faith that incorporates those elements of the Christian tradition that prove consistent with this experience. The alternative is to regard anti-Judaism as a negative characteristic of Christian theology throughout its existence, but one that can be eradicated if the Church adopts a self-critical stance towards its own actions and history.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the tradition, albeit in

modified, reformulated form, provides the framework for a Christian response to the Holocaust. The fact that Moltmann fails to apply his appreciation of the Church's historical record to his own theological understanding of the Holocaust does not invalidate this approach.

The weaknesses inherent in **The Crucified God** serve to highlight the need for a Christian response to the Holocaust to acknowledge both the uniqueness, and the Jewish specificity of the event. Moltmann's insensitivity, reflected in the appropriation of **Night**, and the uncritical usage of the Cross as symbol, arises from a failure to distinguish between the historical reality of the Holocaust, and the event's status as a universal symbol of twentieth century inhumanity to man. Without denying the universal applicability of the symbolism of the Holocaust, suspicion--fuelled by the vivid memory of anti-Judaism--is aroused when this symbol is employed within a Christian context without reference to both the reality and the historical and theological antecedents of the Holocaust. However, by over-emphasising the continuity between Christian anti-Judaism and the Holocaust, Ruether remains insensitive to the radically modern character of the Holocaust. Thus, it is essential to balance an awareness of continuity with a recognition of the elements of discontinuity. To recognise the latter, is not to excuse or ignore the existence of the former.

**Faith and Fratricide** and **The Crucified God** in many ways serve to represent opposite ends of the spectrum of theological responses to the Holocaust. Ruether, along with the derivative work of Roy and Alice Eckardt, marks the radical end of the spectrum. Moltmann, however radical his personal theology, marks the conservative end of the spectrum: although he acknowledges the Church's historical record of anti-Judaism, he does not feel the need to reformulate his religious language or theology in any significant way as a result.

The work of the Catholic theologian, Johann Baptist Metz (a German contemporary of Moltmann's), can be

interpreted as falling midway within this spectrum of response: he accepts Ruether's thesis concerning the centrality of anti-Judaism within Christianity, but adopts an approach similar to that of Moltmann in attempting to reformulate the tradition from inside. However, in stark contrast to Moltmann, he regards the uniqueness of the Holocaust as axiomatic. In a sense, he employs a method similar to that suggested by Baum: he identifies the "positive" content of Christianity, and then proceeds to reformulate theology on this basis; anti-Judaism, being incompatible with this "positive" content, is rejected as an alien distortion, however deepseated. Thus, Christianity is not only a counterculture in relation to society, but also in relation to its own distorted self; true, "messianic" religion renews Christianity, calling it back to its vocation as a counterculture from its lapsed form as "bourgeois" religion. Church history can be read as a process of charisma (messianic religion); routinisation; the lapse into bourgeois religion; followed by the resurgence of charisma. However, the lapse into bourgeois religion represents the bulk of ecclesiastical history. Thus, "true" Christianity is that of the Righteous Gentiles, the minority who responded positively to the Holocaust. The challenge facing a Christian response to the Holocaust is to ensure that this minority concept of faith becomes that of the majority.

Although Metz' analysis of bourgeois and messianic religion is fully developed, the same cannot be said of his strategy for ensuring that the latter becomes the dominant identity of the Church: his work is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Thus, it is impossible to offer a critical appraisal of his strategy at this stage. What follows represents an attempt to cull an outline for such a strategy from Metz' work to date, and to consider his suggestions in the light of the preceding analysis of Ruether and Moltmann.

9. 2. CHRISTIANS AND JEWS AFTER AUSCHWITZ:

Never again ... do theology in such a way that its construction remains unaffected, or could remain unaffected, by Auschwitz....Ask yourself if the theology you are learning is such that it could remain unchanged before and after Auschwitz.<sup>3</sup>

For Johann Baptist Metz, the Holocaust poses the critical challenge to the continuing credibility of Christian theology; a claim that is defended in two major essays: 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz: Being a Meditation also on the End of Bourgeois Religion' (1978), and 'Facing the Jews. Christian Theology after Auschwitz' (1984).<sup>4</sup> In these two essays, he outlines his argument in four stages. A Christian response to the Holocaust demands an acknowledgement of the uniqueness of the event. Having acknowledged the uniqueness of the event, it is incumbent upon Christians to recognise that theology is ruptured by the Holocaust: it cannot "remain unchanged before and after Auschwitz". These two insights culminate in the realisation that Christian theology is now dependent upon dialogue with the Jews. In its initial stages, this dialogue takes the form of listening to what the Jews have to say, about both Christianity and their experience of the Holocaust. Finally, confronting the Holocaust challenges Christianity to return to its roots and re-discover its vocation as a messianic religion.

Metz differs from Moltmann in granting the uniqueness of the Holocaust a priori status:

the overall validity of the Jewish tragedy and of the Holocaust is found exactly in its non-transferability,<sup>5</sup> in its uniqueness and its incomparability.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, his work attains a clarity that stands in stark contrast to the confusion generated in *The Crucified God* between the historical reality of the Holocaust, theological interpretation, and the event's status as a universal symbol. In 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz', Metz identifies and sharply criticises three strategies for evading both the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and the question of Christian culpability.<sup>6</sup>



First, there is the temptation to define Nazism as a "purely National Socialist crime", and thus outside the realm of "Christian causality". Second, the Holocaust is interpreted as a "type or symbol for all kinds of threatening or possible catastrophe in the world". In employing the event as a universal symbol of inhumanity, the lessons to be learned from the specificity of the Holocaust can be lost; universal lessons emerge from an awareness of the Jewish particularity of the event. Third, the Holocaust is held to be a tragedy for both Jews and Christians: in lauding the "Christian martyrs", the Church creates the misleading impression that Christians were victims of the Holocaust alongside the Jews.<sup>7</sup> Whilst not denying that Christians also suffered and died as a consequence of their solidarity with the Jews during the Holocaust, Metz notes that the identification of the plight of Christians with that of the Jews serves both to falsify the historical record, and to detract from the exceptional behaviour of those who did show such solidarity: the behaviour of the Righteous Gentiles needs to be set against the background of the active or passive complicity of the majority of Christians. The interpretation of the Holocaust as a tragedy experienced by both Jews and Christians suggests a lack of sensitivity towards the Church's historical record, both before and during the event. The Holocaust was a tragedy for Christianity, not because Christians were among its victims, but because of the Nazis' ruthless exploitation of the legacy of theological anti-Judaism.

Metz concludes his analysis of uniqueness by demanding that the event be seen as generating a rupture in Christian theology: a theology that remains unaffected by Auschwitz is deemed unacceptable.<sup>8</sup> The key question facing religious belief is now "how we Christians can and may speak of 'God after Auschwitz' in a credible constellation".<sup>9</sup> Metz is quick to acknowledge that the Holocaust is not the only "God-experience" available to Christians, but insists that the key question facing Christianity is that of the divine presence in the

Holocaust.<sup>10</sup> He concludes that it is only possible to speak of God **after** Auschwitz, because there were those who continued to believe **during** the Holocaust. Both Metz and Moltmann suggest a reinterpretation of T. W. Adorno's dictum that to "write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric": to pray after Auschwitz would be impossible, had not prayers been said in Auschwitz.<sup>11</sup> However, whereas Moltmann emphasises the continuum of belief before and after the Holocaust, Metz stresses the discontinuity: belief continues, but in a radically different form. Christians can "form and sufficiently understand their identity only in the face of the Jews".<sup>12</sup>

The formation of Christian identity "in the face of the Jews" takes two forms: an internal critique of Christianity to identify and purge the roots of anti-Judaism, and an external dialogue with the Jews. However, this dialogue initially takes the form of Christians listening to what Jews have to say, both about themselves and about their experience of Christianity. Thus, "dialogue" is something of a misnomer. Christians play a passive role in this "dialogue", responding to, rather than initiating the process:

It is not we who have the opening word, nor do we begin the dialogue. Victims are not offered a dialogue. We can only come into a dialogue when the victims themselves begin to speak. And then it is our primary duty as Christians to listen--**for once to begin really listening--**to what Jews are saying of themselves and about themselves.<sup>13</sup>

Moltmann's appropriation of the child-hanging scene from **Night** constitutes a form of "exploitation": rather than listening "to what Jews are saying of themselves and about themselves", he is appropriating a Jewish text for Christian theological purposes with scant regard for its original context or meaning.<sup>14</sup> Such "exploitation" suggests that despite the increasingly conciliatory tone of Jewish-Christian relations, Christians are still not "really listening" to what their dialogue partners are saying: theology has remained unchanged before and after the Holocaust.

Thus, great importance is attached to the need for an internal critique of Christian theology to identify and cleanse the tradition of anti-Judaism. Until such a critique takes place, dialogue is destined to fail: the stereotypes within Christian religious language and theology prevent theologians from "listening" to what the Jews have to say "of themselves and about themselves"; a failure typified by *The Crucified God*: Moltmann is aware of Christian anti-Judaism, yet is insensitive to the presence of anti-Judaic stereotypes within his own theology. Metz suggests that an internal critique of Christianity should take the form of a recovery of Christianity's Jewish roots as a messianic counterculture: anti-Judaism emerges as a result of the Church's loss of its sense of vocation and its lapse into bourgeois religion. Thus, the first stage in a Christian response to the Holocaust is a recovery of the Church's biblical identity.

### 9. 3. BOURGEOIS OR MESSIANIC RELIGION?

Metz, Moltmann and Ruether all agree that Christianity is called to be a counterculture. However, whereas Ruether holds that this sense of vocation was lost at a very early stage, Metz and Moltmann differ in interpreting Church history as a struggle between authentic and inauthentic Christian identity. For Moltmann, this struggle is understood in a Lutheran sense, as a struggle between the theology of the Cross and the theology of Glory<sup>15</sup>; for Metz, the struggle for identity is between "bourgeois" religion and "messianic" religion.<sup>16</sup> Both Moltmann and Metz interpret Church history as a struggle between the temptation to accommodate with authority and become part of the prevailing society (the theology of Glory / bourgeois religion), and an understanding of Christian identity that is both self-critical and serves as a critique of society (the theology of the Cross / messianic religion). Church history bears witness to a series of renewal movements, when a resurgence of the theology of the Cross / messianic religion challenges the prevailing

theology of Glory / bourgeois religion to recover its lost sense of vocation as a counterculture. The theology of Glory / bourgeois religion is identified with the triumphalist reading of salvation history that gives birth to anti-Judaism. Thus, anti-Judaism is not intrinsic to the theology of the Cross / messianic religion, but represents a primary characteristic of the theology of Glory / bourgeois religion. In Metz' analysis, the recovery of authentic Christian identity will result in the eradication of anti-Judaism via an internal critique of belief and religious language.

In Metz' analysis, bourgeois religion has a number of clearly identifiable characteristics. It is predominantly middle class, legitimating the existing social structure:

It is above all a religion of inner feeling. It does not propose against or in any way oppose the definitions of reality, meaning or truth ... that are accepted by the middle-class society of exchange and success. It gives greater height and depth to what already prevails without it.<sup>17</sup>

Bourgeois religion is characteristically a "merely believed-in (but not lived) faith"<sup>18</sup>, and thus does not exercise any disruptive influence on society: belief conforms to existing intellectual and social norms. Thus, bourgeois religion accommodates to the prevailing authority. Thus, the embodiment of bourgeois religion is found in the response of German liberalism to the two World Wars: the role of religion is to support and justify the policy of the state.

The tendency of bourgeois religion to accommodate with the state is, in Metz' view, its greatest weakness. This tendency has its roots in the conversion of Constantine, and the subsequent elevation of Christianity to the status of the state religion in the Roman Empire. From this point on, bourgeois religion became the predominant understanding of Christianity. Messianic religion takes the form of a periodic resurgence of charisma challenging the established order of bourgeois religion. Thus, Church history is primarily the study of inauthentic Christianity. The sign of this loss of

authentic Christian identity is found in bourgeois religion's "drastic deficit with regard to political resistance and a corresponding excess of political conformity".<sup>19</sup> This support for the established order stands in stark contrast to the subversive nature of the Gospel, with its message that "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the leading characteristic of messianic religion is its power to subvert. The Gospel does not give "greater height and depth to what already applies even without it". It "disrupts one's own self-interest and aims at a fundamental revision of one's habitual way of life".<sup>21</sup> The key symbol of messianic religion is not accommodation, but metanoia--turning round. Christians should be clearly identifiable from the prevailing society, although still a part of it.<sup>22</sup> Rather than being a society of "exchange and success", messianic religion is a covenant between God and His people, and thus is based upon a vision of equality. Metz interprets the biblical stories of the Patriarchs and the Exodus as the history of a people growing in awareness of their status as subjects in the sight of God. As their awareness of this status grows, so does the obligation of responsibility--both towards God and toward themselves as a community.

Messianic faith is built around the triumvirate of memory, narrative and solidarity. It has its basis in the memory of God's promises, both in the covenant and in the ministry of Jesus. The memory of these promises enables messianic faith to survive despite the counter-testimony of history. The memory of God's promises is encapsulated in narrative. The reenactment of the promise in narrative functions to make it active in the present. Thus, the Passover Seder and the Eucharist, the reenactment in narrative form of the divine promise, constitute the central liturgical acts of Judaism and Christianity. Memory and narrative combine in inspiring Christian praxis. Whereas, bourgeois religion is "a merely believed-in (but not lived) faith", messianic religion is only

meaningful when "lived". Christian praxis takes the form of solidarity, both internally as a community, and externally with all who are oppressed, or who have no sense of their identity as subjects. Praxis is life lived in *imitatio Christi*; the command to love one's neighbour finds practical expression in the struggle to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Thus, in contrast with bourgeois religion, messianic faith is necessarily political:

Christianity is in its very being, as messianic praxis of discipleship, political. It is mystical and political at the same time, and it leads us into a responsibility, not only for what we do or fail to do, but also for what we allow to happen to others in our presence, before our eyes.<sup>23</sup>

In the context of the Holocaust, the Righteous Gentiles acted in a manner consistent with messianic faith: they took responsibility for what was being allowed to happen to others.

In supporting his critique of accommodation, Metz cites Jesus' prophecy of persecution and suffering for his disciples (Mk. 13:9-13; Matt. 10:17-22). The extent of Christianity's failure to fulfil its vocation as counterculture is marked by the relative lack of such persecution in Church history:

is it not the case that we Christians can recognise that concrete destiny which Jesus foretold for his disciples more clearly in the history of suffering undergone by the Jewish people than in the actual history of Christianity?<sup>24</sup>

Bourgeois religion's successful accommodation with the state finds expression in the fact that more often than not, Christianity has been the cause (as illustrated by the history of anti-Judaism) rather than the recipient of suffering. Metz identifies the fundamental difference between bourgeois and messianic religion as their interpretation of history. Bourgeois religion adopts a triumphalist interpretation of history, whereas messianic religion strives to incorporate the counter-testimony of "anti-history".<sup>25</sup> If messianic religion is to become the dominant understanding of Christian identity, then the

latter interpretation of history has to be incorporated into Christian theology.

9. 4. THE DESCENT INTO HELL: "ANTI-HISTORY" CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY:

Bourgeois and messianic religion represent alternative interpretations of history: the former adopts a triumphalist approach, the latter calls for "a kind of anti-history" rooted in the memory of suffering. In adopting the latter interpretation, Metz articulates an understanding of history reminiscent of that of Elie Wiesel. Religious belief is rooted in a dialectic of promise and counter-testimony, that gives rise in turn to a communal, "mystical" reading of history. This reading of history fundamentally influences a Christian response to the problem of evil, and is encapsulated in Metz' use of the symbolism of Jesus' Descent into Hell.

Bourgeois religion is marked by a triumphalist interpretation of history:

We tend, consciously or unconsciously, to define history as the history of what has prevailed, as the history of the successful and the established. There is hardly any reference in history as we know it to the conquered and defeated or to the forgotten or suppressed hopes of our historical existence.<sup>26</sup>

Messianic religion strives to sustain the memory of "the conquered and the defeated" as "anti-history"; a counterpoint to bourgeois religion's emphasis upon "the successful and the established". The Exodus serves as the paradigm for "an understanding of history in which the vanquished and destroyed alternative would be taken into account".<sup>27</sup> In establishing His covenant with the Israelite slaves, God challenges the equation of divine favour with "the successful and the established": it is the formerly "conquered and defeated" people of Israel who "prevail".

Thus, "anti-history" constitutes Metz' equivalent to counter-testimony. Messianic faith centres upon a dialectic of covenantal promise and the "anti-history" of suffering: Christian identity emerges out of the

confrontation of the promise of the Resurrection with the counter-testimony of history. The latter poses "the practical challenge to one's hope".<sup>28</sup> However, rather than ignoring the negative side of history, or interpreting the suffering of others as a vindication of one's own hope (as in the Early Church's interpretation of the events of 70 and 135 as a punishment for the Jewish "crime" of deicide), counter-testimony is incorporated into matrix of belief: it is necessary to "mourn history"; to remain conscious of the "cost" of one's success.<sup>29</sup> In the context of Christianity, mourning history requires that we "look at ourselves and judge ourselves with the eyes of our own victims".<sup>30</sup> The critique of anti-Judaism gives practical expression to Metz' call for Christians to view theology and Church history with "the eyes of our own victims". Moltmann's appropriation of **Night**, and his use of the Cross as a symbol, lack such self-consciousness; hence the charge of insensitivity.

In a general sense, Metz' reading of history parallels that of Wiesel. The latter's "mystical" reading of history is as comprehensive as the former's concept of solidarity. Wiesel emphasises the mystical solidarity of the Jewish people throughout history: individual actions effect the whole Chosen People, past and present. Metz argues that messianic solidarity must be all-embracing, incorporating the experience of "the successful and the established" alongside that of "the conquered and defeated":

solidarity is strictly universal in its application to practical fundamental theology. It extends to those who have been overcome and left behind in the march of progress. It includes the dead. Indeed, the theological category of solidarity reveals its mystical and universal aspect above all in its memory of solidarity with the dead.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, both argue that neither the experience of belief, nor that of those "who have been overcome", can be excluded from a definition of faith. The negative effect of history's counter-testimony cannot be excluded through a one-sided emphasis upon the element of promise: the



dialectic between promise and counter-testimony must be maintained.

The emphasis placed upon the "mystical and universal" character of solidarity serves to highlight the differing responses of Metz and Moltmann to the problem of evil. Although acknowledging the challenge posed to the Christian promise by the "anti-history" of suffering, Moltmann argues that it has been overcome in the "once and for all" event of the Cross. However, this victory will only become complete in the new creation, with "the resurrection of the dead, the murdered and the gassed", and "the healing of those in despair who bear lifelong wounds". Metz demurs, in that while accepting the definition of the Cross as a "once and for all event", he challenges the appeal to eschatological verification. The Cross-Resurrection does not resolve the problem of the "anti-history" of suffering, but articulates a single response to it. Suffering constitutes an "incriminating presence", even within the new creation.<sup>32</sup> Whereas, Moltmann reformulates the theology of the Cross as the basis for a response to the problem of evil, Metz appeals to the symbolism of Jesus' Descent into Hell. He suggests that the incorporation of this symbolism into the liturgical commemoration of the Cross and Resurrection gives expression to theology's inability to resolve the problem of evil. The symbol of the Descent into Hell signifies the Church's acknowledgement of the challenge posed by the "anti-history" of "the conquered and defeated". Thus, the promise of the Resurrection incorporates, rather than resolves, the question posed by innocent suffering:

Christianity in its message of redemption, does not offer definitive meaning for the unexpiated sufferings of the past. It narrates rather a distinct history of freedom: freedom on the basis of a redeeming liberation through God in the cross of Jesus.<sup>33</sup>

The "redeeming liberation" experienced in the Cross is only meaningful if it finds expression in a commitment to overcome the suffering of others.<sup>34</sup>

However, as with Moltmann, there remains a suspicion that, despite his claims to the contrary, Metz is ultimately relying upon a form of eschatological verification. In defending his interpretation of the Cross and Resurrection, he asserts that the promise of the future cannot be achieved at the expense of forgetting the "anti-history" of suffering:

Resurrection mediated by the way of the memory of suffering means: The dead, those already vanquished and forgotten, have a meaning which is as yet unrealized.<sup>35</sup>

However, how can "those already vanquished and forgotten" have an "as yet unrealized" meaning, unless it belongs to the eschatological future? If this meaning does belong to the future, then is Metz not guilty of offering a potentially "definitive meaning for the unexpiated sufferings of the past"? In 'Facing the Jews', he calls for a Christian response to the Holocaust that views "the scenario of history with the eyes of the victims".<sup>36</sup> However, if those victims are to be the "vanquished and forgotten" of the Holocaust, that is to say the **Muselmänner**, then it is impossible to reconstruct "the scenario of history": the **Muselmann** is, by definition, beyond thought.<sup>37</sup> Thus, a theology that incorporates the viewpoint of the "vanquished and forgotten" is necessarily going to incorporate a degree of silence, in that such experience is inaccessible to the outsider. Access to the experience of victims is only possible through the voices of survivors, or those victims who died, but left a record of their experience, and thus cannot be fully identified with the "vanquished and forgotten".

#### CONCLUSION:

As a response to the Holocaust, the work of Johann Baptist Metz is less systematically developed than that of Rosemary Radford Ruether or Jürgen Moltmann. At this early stage, two general criticisms can be made.

First, Metz differentiates between bourgeois and messianic religion. However, to what extent is this an arbitrary distinction? Is messianic religion an

anachronistic concept, constructed to provide a yardstick for judging Church history? Is it in fact as artificial a construct as Ruether's "ideal", pre-Fall version of Christianity? The difference being that the arbitrary, anachronistic character of the latter is freely acknowledged. If "messianic religion" is an arbitrary construct, is there any basis for Metz' hope that it will supplant "bourgeois religion"? **Faith in History and Society** and **The Emergent Church** provide a detailed description of messianic religion, but fail to provide a programme for bringing it into being, or for "converting" the adherents of bourgeois religion. The assumption appears to be that the latter will acknowledge the validity of Metz' critique and adopt a similar viewpoint. However, on the evidence of change since both books were written (1980 / 1981), such an assumption appears to have been wildly optimistic.<sup>38</sup>

Second, in responding to the work of Rosemary Radford Ruether, the Jewish historian, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi questions the value of a Christian call for "massive repentance".<sup>39</sup> Both Ruether and Metz emphasise the need for Christians to recognise and repent of the history of anti-Judaism; the latter extends this call by arguing that "Christians can form and sufficiently understand their identity only in the face of the Jews". However, to what extent is such a position valid. The need for "Knowledge and acknowledgement of what has been done to the Jews in the name of a crucified Messiah"<sup>40</sup> is unquestioned. It is also essential that such awareness permeate Christian theology; the criticisms of **The Crucified God** are not levelled at Moltmann's failure to acknowledge the history of anti-Judaism, but at his failure to allow this knowledge to effect his theology; he continues to employ the stereotypical language of anti-Judaism, and is insensitive toward the negative symbolism of the Cross. However, are Metz and Ruether's calls for a new basis to Christian theology (either in dialogue with the Jews, or a non-hierarchical form of Christianity) the only alternatives to Moltmann's refusal to incorporate the

acknowledgement of anti-Judaism into Christian theology? Both approaches demand the repudiation of a substantial proportion of Church history; and in Ruether's case, a substantial amount of classical theology. Is either expectation realistic? Yerushalmi suggests that such a reformulation of theology is ultimately a luxury, solely of concern to Christians. Jewish interest in a Christian response to the Holocaust is limited to the practical effect this has on Christian attitudes towards both Jews and Judaism.<sup>41</sup>

It is ironic that Metz appears to be aware of this fact, but fails to incorporate it into his theology. In 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz', he suggests that a theology that is "unrelated to people and their concrete situations must cease to exist", being "the very essence of superficiality".<sup>42</sup> Yet the inherent danger in calling for history to be seen "with the eyes of the victims" is that such an approach will degenerate into precisely such "superficiality". Merely to talk of viewing history "with the eyes of the victims" suggests a privileging of the testimony of those who can speak over that of the **Muselmänner**. Metz' approach is valid when employed negatively, as in his critique of Moltmann's usage of **Night**. However, he fails to provide a positive framework for such an approach: he fails to build upon his suggestion that theology be based upon a dialectic of promise and "anti-history". Metz' analysis of the problem of evil in connection with the symbolism of Jesus' Descent into Hell serves to illustrate this failure: he fails to disassociate himself from an appeal to eschatological verification. Ultimately, Metz fails to draw the logical conclusions from his own radical proposals. He neither confronts the totality of the experience of victims (in that he ignores the experience of the voiceless), nor the possibility that the problem of evil (as posed by the experience of the voiceless) cannot be incorporated within the existing theological framework.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Having said that it is insufficient merely to acknowledge and repent of the history of anti-Judaism, the significance of such acceptance cannot be overestimated, as is illustrated by the struggles within the major Churches over the public confession of this history. See: Werner Krusche, 'Guilt and Forgiveness: The Basis of Christian Peace Negotiation', **Forgiveness and Study Project**, London: New World Publications, 1987, 6-39; Jürgen Moltmann, 'Forgiveness and Politics', 40-52; Geoffrey Wigoder, **Jewish-Christian Relations Since the Second World War**.
2. See Moltmann's analysis of the German Protestant Churches' response to the Holocaust, culminating in the 1980 resolution of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, in 'Forgiveness and Politics', 40-8.
3. Johann Baptist Metz, 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz', 29.
4. Johann Baptist Metz, 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz'; and 'Facing the Jews. Christian Theology after Auschwitz', in eds. Schüssler Fiorenza and Tracey, **The Holocaust as Interruption**, 26-33.
5. Metz, 'Facing the Jews', 30.
6. Ibid.
7. The question of Christian appropriation of the Holocaust remains a live issue, as is illustrated by the recent controversies over the beatification of Edith Stein and the presence of a Carmelite Convent at Auschwitz.
8. Metz notes that his own theological training remained unaffected by the Holocaust, see 'Facing the Jews', 27-8.
9. Ibid. 31.
10. Ibid. 30.
11. Ibid. 29; 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz', 18-9; Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 277-8; Martin Jay, **Adorno**, London: Fontana, 1984, 48-9.
12. Metz, 'Facing the Jews', 26.
13. Metz, 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz', 20.
14. Ibid. 21.
15. Moltmann, **The Crucified God**, 207-14.
16. Johann Baptist Metz, 'Messianic or Bourgeois Religion', **The Emergent Church**, 1-16.
17. Johann Baptist Metz, **Faith in History and Society**, 45.
18. Metz, **The Emergent Church**, 76.
19. Metz, 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz', 25.
20. Metz, **The Emergent Church**, 2.

21. Ibid. 3.
22. Ibid. 61.
23. Metz, 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz', 27.
24. Ibid. 26.
25. Metz, **Faith in History and Society**, 111.
26. Ibid. The theme of history as the "history of what has prevailed", at the expense of "the conquered and the defeated", recurs throughout Holocaust Literature. See: Jean Améry, **At the Mind's Limits**, 11; Tadeusz Borowski, **This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen**, trans. Barbara Vedder, (1959), New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1988, 131-4.
27. Metz, **Faith in History and Society**, 111.
28. Metz, 'Facing the Jews', 32.
29. Metz, 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz', 18.
30. Metz, **The Emergent Church**, 39.
31. Metz, **Faith in History and Society**, 231.
32. Ibid. 124.
33. Ibid. 129.
34. Ibid. 229.
35. Ibid. 113-4.
36. Metz, 'Facing the Jews', 28.
37. Primo Levi, **The Drowned and the Saved**, 63-4.
38. Metz identifies Messianic religion with Liberation theology, in 'Transforming a Dependent People: Toward a Base Community Church', **The Emergent Church**, 82-94. However, the extent to which such an assertion is justifiable is questionable. Compare Rebecca Chopp's analysis of Metz with her analyses of Gustavo Gutierrez and Jose Miguez Bonino, **The Praxis of Suffering**, 64-81, 46-63, 82-99.
39. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, 'Response to Rosemary Radford Ruether', 106.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid. 106-7.
42. Metz, 'Christians and Jews after Auschwitz', 22.

10. CONCLUSION: WHAT CAN--AND CANNOT--BE SAID?

10. 1. INTRODUCTION.

10. 2. THE CONTRASTING CLAIMS OF SPEECH AND SILENCE.

10. 21. THE EXPIRATION OF SPEECH.

10. 22. FALTERING SPEECH.

10. 3. RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE AFTER THE HOLOCAUST.

10. 4. THE HOLOCAUST AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: A THEODICY  
OF PROTEST.

10. 5. THE REJECTION OF THEODICY: STARTING ALL OVER AGAIN.

10. 1. INTRODUCTION:

The same challenge is faced by Judaism and Christianity. Both are religions of redemption; both proclaim a God who cares and the preciousness of the human in the image of God. Both are covenanted religions, predicated on the concepts of divine initiatives and redemptive acts and human committed responses and ways of living in order to advance and participate in that salvation. The Holocaust is a total assault on all these statements. It is counter-testimony which undercuts the persuasiveness of both religions and contradicts the hope which they offer.<sup>1</sup>

All the responses considered thus far acknowledge, to a greater or lesser extent, the status of the Holocaust as counter-testimony to the redemptive claims of both Judaism and Christianity. As counter-testimony, the Holocaust presents a challenge analogous to that posed by previous disasters (the destruction of the Second Temple, the Expulsion from Spain). However, the majority of respondents argue that the event constitutes historical counter-testimony on an unprecedented scale, and thus cannot be absorbed into the existing religious framework.<sup>2</sup> In view of this unanimity, it is surprising to note that only Wiesel (and to a lesser extent, Metz) considers the implications of such an interpretation of the Holocaust for religious language. The "total assault" of the Holocaust cannot be confined to the impact of the event upon the religious claims of Judaism and Christianity; the language in which these claims are expressed is inevitably

affected as well. It is illogical to assert, on the one hand, that the Holocaust ruptures belief, with a subsequent need for new theological categories; and on the other, to deny that the same rupture has any substantial impact upon religious language.

Wiesel's awareness of the impact of the Holocaust upon religious language is a reflection of his awareness of the dilemma facing the writer, particularly the survivor-writer, who regards literature as both a continuation of the victims' compulsion to bear witness, and the erection of a tombstone to the dead. He is not alone in regarding the conflict between speech and silence as <sup>one of</sup> the dominant themes of Holocaust literature. Silence has a threefold significance. First, silence signifies respect for the dead. Second, it symbolises the absence of both the destroyed communities, and the six million individuals who died. Third, silence is a potential response for the writer confronted with the inadequacy of speech as a vehicle for communicating the experience of the Holocaust. However, the writer is also compelled to speak. Bearing witness is an imperative, handed on to the living by the dead. Speech is an essential weapon against forgetfulness: to allow the dead to be forgotten is considered the equivalent of killing them a second time.<sup>3</sup> The refusal to speak can also serve to invite a repetition of the Holocaust. To remain silent can be construed as an abdication of responsibility: speech is essential, if the lessons of the past are to be both communicated and learnt. Holocaust literature suggests two broad responses to the dilemma posed by the conflicting claims of speech and silence: "expiration" and "faltering speech". In the case of the former, speech ultimately fails; a failure that has radical repercussions for the writer.

The dilemma facing the Holocaust writer parallels that facing the theologian. The consensus is that a religious response to the Holocaust must be faithful to both the belief and unbelief generated during the Holocaust: one cannot be privileged at the expense of the



other. However, despite this consensus in theory, only Wiesel maintains the tension between belief and unbelief in practice. Both Berkovits and Fackenheim implicitly privilege belief over unbelief; whereas Rubenstein sacrifices the assertion of belief in order to emphasise the integrity of those who lost faith. The parallel with the dilemma facing the Holocaust writer is evident: at one end of the spectrum is the total breakdown of speech about God (Rubenstein); at the other, the refusal to allow the Holocaust to radically effect belief (the prevalent attitude among Orthodox Jews, as articulated by the current British Chief Rabbi, Lord Jakobovits.<sup>4</sup>). Between these two poles lies a series of variations, with belief being articulated in an ambivalent manner reminiscent of faltering speech. Irving Greenberg identifies such a position as "moment faith", lived between the experiences of Sinai and Auschwitz. "Moment faith" finds its fullest expression in the work of Elie Wiesel. The inference being that his awareness of, and response to, the conflicting claims of speech and silence is paralleled by an awareness of the need to incorporate both belief and unbelief into a religious response to the Holocaust.

It is an irony that the closest Christian parallel to Wiesel's awareness of the correspondence between an awareness of the limitations of language as a vehicle for expressing atrocity, and the need to maintain the tension between belief and unbelief, is found within contemporary philosophy of religion's concern over the ethical validity of theodicy, rather than in the Christian responses of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Jürgen Moltmann, and Johann Baptist Metz. Ruether is acutely sensitive to the need for an inner critique of anti-Judaism within Christian religious language. However, although calling for a total reformulation of Christian theology in response to the Holocaust, she limits her critique of language to the presence of hierarchical stereotypes, rather than addressing the question of religious language per se. As has been shown, the major weakness in Moltmann's approach lies in his non-critical usage of stereotypical language

(marking a failure to recognise the need for an inner critique of anti-Judaism in Christian theology) and Christian symbolism. Metz acknowledges the need for a reformulation of religious language in response to the Holocaust: Christians are dependent upon listening to what the Jews qua victims have to say about God. This position arises out of his call for religious language per se to incorporate the perspective of the "conquered and defeated", as well as that of the "successful and the established". However, Metz fails to consider the full ramifications of either idea.

All three respondents follow the pattern of Jewish responses in acknowledging the status of the Holocaust as radical counter-testimony. Thus, the context of a Christian response to the event is provided by the question of theodicy. Both the Jewish and Christian responses considered here are unanimous in rejecting the traditional theodicy of "for our sins we are punished". Wiesel and Rubenstein reject theodicy in any form; whereas Berkovits and Moltmann (and possibly Fackenheim and Metz) appeal to theodicy in the form of eschatological verification.

It is perhaps significant that the closest parallels to Wiesel are found, not in a Christian response to the Holocaust, but in the complementary realm of philosophy of religion, where there has been detailed discussion of both the ethical validity of theodicy as a response to the problem of innocent suffering, and the effect that the rejection of theodicy has upon religious language. The rejection of theodicy has led to conclusions that resemble, albeit in more developed form, those reached by Johann Baptist Metz. The parallels between Wiesel and the questions occupying philosophy of religion reflect a shared concern<sup>the</sup> with challenge posed by the individual who protests his innocence, and rejects theodicy as an inappropriate response on moral grounds. The consensus being that, even if theodicy provides an intellectually consistent "justification" for the existence of evil and

innocent suffering, it is a "justification" that belongs in a different dimension to, and therefore fails to address, the experience of the victim. The connection between a response to the Holocaust and concern over the ethical validity of theodicy is explicitly drawn by John Roth in his essay, 'A Theodicy of Protest'.<sup>5</sup> Roth strives to preserve theodicy through the incorporation of protest, as symbolised by Wiesel's Trial of God. However, as with Moltmann's attempt to incorporate Ivan Karamazov's moral rebellion within a theology of the Cross, the protest serves to subvert the supporting framework: the Trial of God is an expression of moral dissatisfaction with theodicy as a response to the problem of innocent suffering; such dissatisfaction cannot be harnessed in the defence of the moral validity of theodicy.

Thus, if <sup>a Christian response.</sup>  $\wedge$  is to be consistent with the perspective of Wiesel, it too must be built upon the rejection of theodicy. It is ironic that the Christian thinker who mostly closely parallels his position on this point is the British philosopher of religion, Stewart Sutherland; the irony lies in the fact that Sutherland never directly addresses the subject of the Holocaust. It is the contention of this thesis that his work on theodicy and religious language provides the most effective basis for a Christian response to the Holocaust.

#### 10. 2. THE CONTRASTING CLAIMS OF SPEECH AND SILENCE:

In writing about the Holocaust, the writer is confronted by the conflicting claims of speech and silence. Pictured diagrammatically, speech and silence constitute two poles, both of which are deemed unacceptable. Silence is ultimately hermetic: it closes off access to the Holocaust. Speech is inadequate: it proves incapable of communicating the totality of the writer's experience, and thus runs the risk of distorting the nature of the event. Ambivalence towards speech as a vehicle for communicating experience forms a recurrent theme in literature, but reaches crisis point when confronted by the Holocaust.<sup>6</sup> Uniqueness lies not in the conflicting claims of speech

and silence per se, but in the events that gave rise to them, and in the consequences for the writer who fails to resolve this conflict. The Holocaust writer is struggling to represent the mechanised mass-slaughter of both individuals and communities; a slaughter that involved the eradication of all traces of the victims. The writer has both to represent the eradication of this trace, and to recreate what has been lost as a "tombstone" to the dead: literature fulfils the function of lamentation for the dead. Thus, the very act of writing serves to emphasise what has been lost, and the inability of literature to fulfil its commemorative function: having re-created the lives of individuals and communities, the writer has to re-enact their loss. The failure to resolve, however ambivalently, the conflicting claims of speech and silence often results in the physical self-destruction of the writer.

Holocaust writers adopt two clearly identifiable strategies for resolving the conflict between speech and silence; one negative, one positive (although in this context, the term "positive" demands qualification). The negative strategy results in the "expiration" of speech, either through death or a self-imposed literary silence.<sup>7</sup> Although this strategy is usually associated with the work of the German-speaking poets, Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs<sup>8</sup>, it can more effectively be illustrated by reference to the post-war career of the Polish writer, Tadeusz Borowski. Self-strangulation via the expiration of speech signifies the nadir in the spectrum of strategies for responding to the conflicting demands of speech and silence. The majority of Holocaust writers consciously avoid this nadir, by adopting a more positive, albeit still ambivalent, attitude toward speech. The decision to embrace speech is never unambiguous; the writer remains acutely conscious of the limitations of his chosen medium. Hence, the decision to describe this second strategy as "faltering speech"<sup>9</sup>: the writer speaks, yet remains conscious of the gulf between both his own experience as a survivor and that of the victims, encapsulated in the

symbol of the **Muselmann**; and between those with personal experience of the Holocaust, and those who were "outside". Unlike the writer who follows a strategy of expiration, the writer who employs "faltering speech" elects to allude to, rather than signify, the extermination of the six million Jews and the destruction of the **Shtetl** culture of Eastern Europe. The elusiveness of the connection between the experience of the Holocaust and its representation becomes a dominant theme for such writers. The strategy of "faltering speech" can be most clearly illustrated by reference to the work of Elie Wiesel.

10. 21. The Expiration of Speech:

In **A Double Dying**, the literary critic, Alvin Rosenfeld coins the term "the poetics of expiration" to describe the drying up of the writer's--and more specifically, the poet's--speech. The poet elects to become figuratively silent in order to represent the physical silence of the "Six Million". Rosenfeld specifically coins the term "expiration" because of its capacity to allude to the temptation for this literary strategy to find practical expression in the subsequent physical silence of the poet, through suicide (Celan) or madness (Sachs). Although Rosenfeld confines "expiration" to poetry, it represents a general strategy in Holocaust literature for resolving the conflicting claims of speech and silence: the closing down or failure of the writer's speech serves to reflect the "expiration" of those who died. The most extreme version of this strategy is found, not in the work of Celan or Sachs, but in that of Tadeusz Borowski. There is a general consensus among literary critics that his suicide can only be viewed as inevitable, in the light of his interpretation of the Holocaust.

Borowski was a member of the Polish intelligentsia in Warsaw, prior to his arrest in 1943. He was sent to Auschwitz as a political prisoner and remained there until the summer of 1944, when he was evacuated to Germany. He was liberated from Dachau on May 1, 1945. After five months in a displaced persons camp, and a brief period in

Paris, Borowski returned to Warsaw on May 31, 1946. Although he published one volume of poetry, **Wherever the Earth**, in the winter of 1942, his reputation was established by two volumes of short stories: **Farewell to Maria** (1947), a collection of stories about his experiences in Auschwitz and Dachau; and **World of Stone** (1948), about the D. P. camps in Germany and his return to Warsaw. These two volumes were re-published together posthumously in 1959 under the title, **This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen**. Shortly after the publication of these two volumes, Borowski became a member of the Communist party. Under the influence of Stalinist socialist realism, he abandoned literature for a career in journalism.<sup>10</sup> On July 1, 1951, aged twenty eight, Borowski gassed himself. He himself described **Farewell to Maria** as "a voyage to the limit of a particular experience"; the consensus among both his Polish contemporaries and literary critics is that Borowski's suicide constitutes the final statement in this literary "voyage".<sup>11</sup>

It is necessary to set **This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen** against the background of post-war, Eastern European Literature. Borowski's compatriot and contemporary, the poet Czeslaw Milosz argues that this literature was driven by the desire to eradicate "emotional luxuries". In his analysis of the place of the intellectual in Stalinist Eastern Europe, **The Captive Mind**, Milosz lays out the criteria for a literature devoid of "emotional luxuries":

The work of human thought **should** withstand the test of brutal, naked reality. If it cannot, it is worthless. Probably only those things are worth while which can preserve their validity in the eyes of a man threatened with instant death.<sup>12</sup>

Only literature depicting "naked reality" was deemed valid. However, is not the imposition of such a yardstick self-defeating? Can literature ever preserve its "validity in the eyes of a man threatened with instant death"? Borowski's answer is a negative one, hence his decision to embrace Communism and socialist realism. His suicide was a

response to an increasing disillusionment with both alternatives.<sup>14</sup>

The stories in **This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen** represent a confrontation with the "naked reality" of the Holocaust, and as such have been described as "the cruelest<sup>(5a)</sup> of testimonies to what men did to men, and a pitiless verdict that anything can be done to a human being."<sup>14</sup> For Borowski, Auschwitz represents reality in microcosm. Both morality and previous history are understood by reference to his personal experience in the deathcamps.<sup>15</sup> By eschewing any wider sense of historical or moral perspective, he strives to represent the "naked reality" of the Holocaust. The desire to portray "naked reality" informs Borowski's choice of language. Sidra Ezrahi and James Young both note that the language he employs is as "concentrated" as his interpretation of Auschwitz.<sup>16</sup> **This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen** is noticeable for the almost total absence of metaphor; the metaphors that are employed are self-referential: the metaphors for describing Auschwitz are drawn from the life of the camp. Thus, the use of metaphor serves to emphasise the self-enclosed character of **l'univers concentrationnaire**:

Rather than risking a dilution of these experiences, or an escape or transcendence of them through metaphor, Borowski would concentrate the reader's mind through metaphor, doubling the impact (not mitigating it) through analogue.<sup>17</sup>

To illustrate the point: Borowski describes the self-enclosed existence of Auschwitz through recourse to a metaphor alluding to the use of Zyklon B, a chemical originally used for delousing, in the gas chambers--delousing being a euphemism employed by the Nazis to describe the gassing process:

The camp had been sealed off tight. Not a single prisoner,<sup>18</sup> not one solitary louse, can escape through the gate.

For Borowski, the Holocaust lays bare the veneer of civilization, revealing the primal struggle for survival underneath. The concentration camp is merely the means by

which one group exerts control over less powerful groups. Existence in the camps reflects a similar pattern. The political prisoners survive by dominating less powerful groups in the camp hierarchy: the Gypsies and the Jews. Consistent with this interpretation, several of the stories in **This Way Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen** are narrated from the perspective of a collaborator with the system, for whom Auschwitz is "home". This authorial identification is a conscious literary strategy.<sup>19</sup> Borowski's adopted persona reflects his interpretation of Auschwitz:

The first duty of Auschwitzers is to make clear just what a camp is ... But let them not forget that the reader will unfailingly ask: But how did it happen that **you** survived? ... Tell, then, how you brought places in the hospital, easy jobs ... how you brought women, men, what you did in the barracks, unloading the transports, at the gypsy camp; tell about the daily life of the camp, about the hierarchy of fear, about the loneliness of every man. But write that you, you were the ones who did this. That a portion of the sad fame of Auschwitz belongs to you as well.<sup>20</sup>

Morality in Auschwitz, or in a book about Auschwitz, is deemed an "emotional luxury".

The absence of a moral voice combines with the self-referential use of metaphor to generate a dead-pan tone that verges upon the flippant. There is no sense of respect or mourning for the dead, as in the work of Primo Levi or Elie Wiesel. This deadpan tone serves to highlight further the brutality of Borowski's subject-matter: there is no attempt to minimise or gloss over the "naked reality" of Auschwitz. The very title chosen for the first of his short stories, 'This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen', typifies this approach.

Borowski's "concentrated" interpretation of Auschwitz persists after liberation: the survivor has been violated. The effects of such an experience remain even after the cause (the deathcamps) has been removed. The survivor continues to interpret reality by the criteria of the concentration camp:



Concentration camp existence ... taught us that the whole world is really like a concentration camp; the weak work for the strong, and if they have no strength or will to work--then let them steal, or let them die.<sup>21</sup>

The survivor is confronted by both his inability to escape from the "standards" of concentration-camp existence, and an unwillingness to acknowledge the extent to which he "collaborated" with these "standards".<sup>22</sup>

In Borowski's case, the inability to escape from the "standards" of the deathcamps generates a nihilistic attitude to society--a nihilism that proves increasingly incompatible with continued speech. The relationship between the survivor in his stories and society is one of radical discontinuity: the survivor continues both to see himself as outside the boundaries of society, and to see society as a collaborator with the régime that excluded him. In 'World of Stone', Borowski represents this discontinuity in apocalyptic terms:

Sometimes it seems to me that even my physical sensibilities have coagulated and stiffened within me like resin....Through half-open eyes I see with satisfaction that once again a gust of the cosmic gale has blown the crowd into the air ... sucked the human bodies into a huge whirlpool....And I see that this weird snarl, this gigantic stew concocted out of the human crowd, flows along the street down the gutter, and seeps into space with a loud gurgle, like water into a sewer.<sup>23</sup>

Such a wealth of imagery stands in stark contrast to the scarcity of metaphor in the stories depicting concentration-camp existence. However, the imagery remains self-referential: it is limited to the representation of impersonal, destructive force. "Naked reality" has given way to an apocalyptic vision of the destructive force unleashed by Nazi Germany. The whole passage serves to underline the isolation of the survivor, and the gulf separating him from the "human crowd".

In the context of Borowski's desire to portray the "naked reality" of the deathcamps, literature itself is deemed to be an "emotional luxury". Having written about his experiences in Auschwitz and Dachau, and upon

liberation, there was nothing more to be said. Milosz suggests that Borowski's interest in journalism represents an attempt to both communicate and act upon the lessons of Auschwitz. The embracing of Stalinism constitutes an attempt to oppose force with force: if Auschwitz teaches that history can only be interpreted in terms of domination and power, then the only response is to adopt a reading of history that is capable of opposing Nazism. Borowski "reads" his personal experience as proof of the irrelevance of the individual, and more specifically, the victim, in history; a reading that feeds naturally into a Stalinist conception of reality. Borowski's suicide suggests that the perceived equation between Stalinism and the lessons of "naked reality", as learnt in the deathcamps, was no longer held to be convincing.

Borowski's literary strategy can be interpreted in terms of "expiration": such an analysis of the deathcamps renders continued speech impossible. The absence of any external frame of reference ensured that his "meaning-making capacity" remained "interned". Borowski's suicide can thus legitimately be viewed as the inevitable result of this inability to break free of, or utilise, his personal experience of the camps:

In a way, his incarceration might ... be said to have lasted from 1943 to 1951....The outer world became an extension of the camps--a world he could never leave. Walled in by his governing tropes, Borowski killed himself, by gas in 1951, yet another extension perhaps of camp figures.<sup>24</sup>

This total reliance on Holocaust-based language deprived Borowski of any positive counter-balance for his experience of the deathcamps. Whereas Wiesel juxtaposes the negative witness of the Holocaust with the positive values of the covenant (particularly as symbolised by his pre-war childhood in Sighet), Borowski can only view the Holocaust in negative terms: it has become exclusively self-referential. His brief support for Stalinism can be understood as an attempt to locate a contextual framework (albeit one consistent with his experience of Auschwitz:

the deathcamps inform his interpretation of Stalinism, rather than vice versa).

Thus, Borowski's brief career serves to illustrate the literal "expiration" of the writer's voice when confronted by the Holocaust. Language has proved incapable of passing Milosz's test of "naked reality". In this instance, literature is replaced, first by journalism, and then by silence. **This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen** is the most radical attempt to date to describe the Holocaust in a manner devoid of "emotional luxuries". The attempt to portray "naked reality" places too great a strain on both language and the writer, and thus it ultimately proves self-defeating. If a response to the Holocaust is to be effective, it requires the presence of an external framework. Furthermore, we might ask if it is not the case that the simple fact of the writer's survival undercuts any attempt to portray the "naked reality" of the Holocaust: the survivor writes from a perspective alien to his "characters". The writer who adopts a strategy of "expiration" ignores the fact that his work can never be a pure act of mimesis. It is inevitably an act of re-creation, and as such, necessarily adopts a viewpoint that is only available to the survivor.

#### 10. 22. FALTERING SPEECH:

The alternative to "expiration" is to affirm the positive function of speech as a vehicle for communication. Even so, this affirmation remains ambivalent: the writer continues to be acutely conscious of the limitations of speech. It is acknowledged, either implicitly or explicitly, that the survivor / writer is incapable of representing the "naked reality" of the Holocaust.

It is significant that the majority of Holocaust writers avoid explicitly portraying the reality of the deathcamps. Apart from memoirs (such as Primo Levi's **If This is a Man** or Wiesel's **Night**), very few writers situate their work in the deathcamps. The majority of novels concentrate upon Jewish community life prior to deportation. Emphasis is placed upon the struggle for

survival of individuals and communities.<sup>24</sup> The existence of the deathcamps is acknowledged, either by allusion<sup>25</sup>, or second-hand reports.<sup>26</sup> The reader completes the text by bringing to bear his own knowledge of the Jews' eventual destination and fate. Thus, these texts are marked by an emphasis upon the life of the *Shtetl* communities prior to deportation, rather than upon their deaths. Literature becomes both an act of resurrection (the *Shtetls* now only exist in fiction), and an act of commemoration (writing takes the place of traditional lamentation).<sup>27</sup>

A second difference between "faltering speech" and "expiration" lies in the appeal to a set of values other than the "standards" of the deathcamps. Even memoirs of the camps avoid Borowski's self-referentiality through the incorporation of a moral voice; a memory of the alternative values of pre-Holocaust existence. Emphasis is placed upon the discontinuity between the writer's life before the war and his experience during the Holocaust. Thus, rather than being a representation of the world in microcosm, the camps are seen as an alien world--*l'univers concentrationnaire*--within the known world. The memoir, and any subsequent novels, chart the writer's attempt to reconcile these two worlds. In the memoir, the values of pre-camp existence are reflected in the narrator's struggle to establish and maintain human relationships. In *Night*, there is the recurrent motif of Wiesel's relationship with his father; in *If This is a Man*, there is Levi's friendship with Alberto and Lorenzo. Both writers credit their survival, in part, to such reminders of an alternative reality.

Both the self-imposed limitation in subject matter and the recourse to an alternative worldview represent deliberate literary strategies. Wiesel and Levi suggest that an additional limitation is imposed on them: their very survival limits their experience of the Holocaust. The problem confronting the survivor-writer is encapsulated in the image of the *Muselmann*.<sup>28</sup> The now

archetypal description of the **Muselmann** is provided by Primo Levi:

the **muselmänner**, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark already dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand.<sup>29</sup>

It is the **Muselmann** who encapsulates the Nazis' "success" in dehumanising their victims, and thus symbolises the essence of **l'univers concentrationnaire**. As a "non-subject", the **Muselmann** is unable to communicate his experience, as he is, by definition, dumb. The survivor therefore speaks both on his own behalf, and on behalf of the **Muselmänner**. However, as the **Muselmann** is incapable of speech, his experience is necessarily inaccessible. The survivor is re-creating the experience of those who died on the limited basis of his own experience. His witness can therefore only ever be a part of the whole, pointing to what necessarily remains unsaid.

The survivor-writer remains acutely conscious that he is able to write, precisely because he never stood in the place of total experience in relation to the Holocaust. Those who stood in the place of total experience--the **Muselmänner**--cannot speak. The survivor defends his self-appointment as spokesman for the dead on the grounds that only the survivor can have any idea of the experience of those who died. If the survivor does not speak, the experience of the Holocaust would become totally, rather than partially, inaccessible.

Thus, both the speech and the witness of the survivor-writer can be termed "faltering". Speech falters because of the inherent difficulties in communicating the experience of mass atrocity.<sup>30</sup> The testimony of the survivor is "faltering" in view of the twofold gulf perceived to exist: between the experience of the survivor and that of the **Muselmann**; and between the survivor and those with no personal experience of the Holocaust.

Ambivalence toward language becomes an integral element in the survivor-writer's style. There is an inevitable irony in Primo Levi's lyrical description of the **Muselmänner**, who are--by definition--silent. Wiesel's literary style is similarly fluent. The language both writers employ serves to underline the gulf between the survivor-writer and his subject matter. An alternative strategy is to employ silence or dumbness as motifs. Instead of striving to echo the silence of the dead, or the "dumbness" of the submerged (as is the aim of "expiration"), "faltering speech" strives to represent this silence figuratively, eschewing mimetic realism.

"Faltering speech" differs from "expiration", in that there is no attempt to portray the "naked reality" of the Holocaust. It is acknowledged from the start that such a strategy is self-defeating. The intention is instead to provide outsiders with access to the event. Equally significant is the survivor-writer's desire to rehumanise the abstract figure of Six Million. A further problem arises with the dying-out of the generation of eye-witnesses. The speech of second-hand accounts of the Holocaust is inevitably of a different kind to that of survivors: such accounts are even further removed from the reality being described. The imperative to speak remains binding, but the consciousness of the limitations of language as a vehicle for communication increases. Survivors suggest that the legitimacy of second-hand accounts depends upon the extent to which they listen to the testimony of those who were there, i.e. on the extent to which they acknowledge the privileged status of victim and survivor testimony. This criterion of legitimacy is recognised by both Jewish and Christian theologians.

#### 10. 3. RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE AFTER THE HOLOCAUST:

The theologian is confronted by a conflict of claims parallel to that facing the Holocaust writer. Whereas, the former is torn between the conflicting demands of speech and silence, the latter is compelled to affirm both belief and unbelief as authentic responses to the Holocaust.

Contemporary religious responses to the Holocaust covered the spectrum from messianic or apocalyptic interpretations (Elchonon Wassermann), through the "authentic" Judaism of the Hasidim and the Orthodox, to contention with God and the loss of belief (as depicted in *Night*). The majority of Jewish thinkers agree that it is necessary for a post facto religious response to reflect the breadth of this spectrum. The theologian who comes after the event does not have the right to question the validity of any of these responses. However, how is the theologian to affirm belief and unbelief simultaneously? The difficulties inherent in responding to this question can be illustrated from the work of Eliezer Berkovits and Fackenheim who, despite their protestations to the contrary, resolve the dilemma by privileging belief over unbelief. Irving Greenberg and Elie Wiesel suggest that the only resolution to this dilemma lies in the acknowledgement that neither belief nor unbelief provides a sufficient basis for a religious response to the Holocaust: a response is generated in the "borderlands" between the two; either belief is incorporated into unbelief (moral rebellion), or unbelief becomes an integral part of belief (the Trial of God).

Whereas Rubenstein emphasises unbelief at the expense of belief, and Berkovits and Fackenheim privilege the latter to the exclusion of the former, Greenberg and Wiesel strive to sustain the tension between the two. Greenberg suggests that belief is only possible after the Holocaust in the form of "moment faith". The silence of God during the Holocaust stands as radical counter-testimony to His presence on Mount Sinai. Faith has to bear witness to the integrity of both experiences. The immediacy of the Holocaust must not be allowed to obscure the memory of the Exodus; nor must the certainty generated by the Exodus be allowed to obscure the anguish generated by the Holocaust. As "moment faith", belief incorporates the reality of anguish and doubt:

Faith is living life in the presence of the Redeemer, even when the world is unredeemed. After Auschwitz, there are moments when the flames and

smoke of burning children blot out faith. But even when faith reasserts itself, the smoke of Auschwitz obscures the presence of God.<sup>31</sup>

The memory of Auschwitz does not eradicate covenantal faith, but its immediacy does serve to obscure any positive sense of the divine presence. As a result, post-Holocaust religious language acquires an inherent ambiguity, reflecting the tensions generated by the simultaneous affirmation of the presence and absence of God.

Neither traditional covenantal faith nor atheism is deemed to be a sufficient response to the Holocaust. Greenberg suggests that the appropriate response to the event would be a period of silence in theology. After the Holocaust, the only meaningful theological statements are those "credible in the presence of burning children".<sup>32</sup> Such a criterion, as was the case with Milosz's of "naked reality", can only result in silence: no theological statement would be credible in the "presence of burning children". Hence Greenberg's suggestion that there be a period of silence in theology. The appropriate religious response to the Holocaust is practical, rather than theological: the only meaningful religious response lies in the practical re-creation of humanity in the image of God. If the Holocaust is encapsulated in the symbol of the **Muselmann**, then a religious response should concern itself with the restoration of humanity as the image of God:

the overwhelming testimony of the six million is so strong that it all but irretrievably closes out religious language. Therefore the religious enterprise after this event must see itself as a desperate attempt to create, save, and heal the image of God wherever it still exists.<sup>33</sup>

For Jews, this act of re-creation can take two forms: the decision to bear children, and participation in the struggle for human rights. Both actions signify an affirmation of the continued meaningfulness of human existence.

It is at this point that the flaws in Greenberg's argument begin to emerge. If religious affirmation is



identified with the decision to bear children or with participation in the struggle for human rights, then the division between religious and secular Jews is dissolved. Such acts are deemed expressions of "faith", regardless of the individual's motivation. Thus, Greenberg adopts a strategy similar to that of Emil Fackenheim: he resolves the dilemma of affirming both belief and unbelief by incorporating the latter into the former.

Thus, of the Jewish thinkers considered, only Elie Wiesel refuses to resolve the tension between belief and unbelief. It is the thought of Wiesel, rather than that of Greenberg that serves to illustrate the latter's concept of "moment faith". Wiesel is adamant that after the Holocaust the "true believers" are the "angry believer" and the "angry non-believer". The "angry non-believer" (or protest atheist) and the "angry believer" share a common moral outrage at any attempt to respond to the problem of innocent suffering by reference to theodicy: there is no justification for innocent suffering. The victim is the only person entitled to discover meaning in his own suffering, or to offer forgiveness.

The dominant motif in both Wiesel's fiction and in his biblical and hasidic portraits is that of the individual sufferer proclaiming his innocence before God. This motif is pushed to its limits in the Trial of God: God is tried and found guilty on the basis of His covenantal promises. Thus, the very notion of putting God on trial is dependent on continued acceptance of the covenantal framework. The difference being that in Wiesel's thought, it is God, rather than His Chosen People, who is guilty of covenantal unfaithfulness. He is adamant that the maintenance of the tension between belief and unbelief is a positive, rather than a negative, influence: it emphasises both the need and humanity's responsibility for bringing about **Tikkun**. After the Holocaust, the divine presence can only be experienced through **Tikkun**; which, in turn, can only occur within a communal context. The individual recognises continuity, as well as

discontinuity, between his own anguish and that of the wider community. Contention with God is only a valid response if it arises from concern for others as well as for oneself, and if it increases both the individual's awareness of and sense of responsibility for **Tikkun**. As a religious response to the Holocaust, contention is, in effect, an expression of the individual's commitment to covenantal ethics in spite of God's failure to fulfil His promise to protect His people.

10.4. THE HOLOCAUST AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: A THEODICY OF PROTEST:

The two issues that dominate discussion of Jewish responses to the Holocaust are the adequacy of theodicy, and the danger of privileging "positive" testimony. Rubenstein and Wiesel are adamant in rejecting theodicy; whereas, Fackenheim is equivocal, and Berkovits strives to absorb the Holocaust within the existing theodicy of **Hester Panim**. With regard to the privileging of testimony: Wiesel alone succeeds in privileging neither belief nor unbelief; resistance nor the silent testimony of the **Muselmänner**. The same two issues cannot be said to dominate Christian responses to the Holocaust. Not surprisingly, emphasis is placed instead upon role played by Christianity's history of anti-Judaism. Both Moltmann and Metz consider the Holocaust in relation to the problem of evil, but neither discusses the question in a depth parallel to that found in the Jewish responses. Ironically, an equivalent level of discussion is found, not in direct responses to the Holocaust, but in the related debate in philosophy of religion over the ethical validity of theodicy.

Discussion of the problem of evil is dominated by debate over the appropriateness of theodicy as a response to the problem of innocent suffering. The challenge to theodicy is held to be classically expressed by Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov. The argument expressed is that, even if theodicy offers an intellectually convincing "justification" for the existence of evil, such an

"explanation" belongs in a different dimension to the reality of innocent suffering, and thus fails to address the experience of the victim.<sup>34</sup>

To date, the most specific attempt to integrate discussion of theodicy into a Christian response to the Holocaust is found in the work of John Roth, most specifically in his essay, 'A Theodicy of Protest'. Roth's essay is part of a collection that strives to articulate a theodicy that is "credible" in the light of the Holocaust--"the paradigm evil event to which theodicies now refer."<sup>35</sup> Roth's interest in theodicy arises out of his engagement with the work of Elie Wiesel.<sup>36</sup> He roots his response to the Holocaust in the premise that it is "the paradigm evil event". 'A Theodicy of Protest' offers both a critique of traditional theodicy, and outlines an alternative response centred upon Wiesel's motif of the Trial of God.

Traditional theodicy is defined as "human vindications of God's justice in permitting evil to exist."<sup>37</sup> Evil is "activity" or "inactivity" that "wastes": it "ignores and violates the sanctity of individual persons".<sup>38</sup> Theodicy, in the form of versions of the free will defence that appeal to eschatological verification, is dismissed on the grounds that it projects an "instrumental view of evil", and thus "legitimizes" it: evil becomes the regrettable, but inevitable "price" of the attainment of salvation through the exercise of free will.<sup>39</sup> Roth echoes Ivan Karamazov in rejecting an "instrumental" conception of evil on the grounds that the "price" is too high:

a protesting theodicy is skeptical because it will not forget the futile cries. No good that it can envision, on earth or beyond, is worth the freedom<sup>40</sup> enfeebled and empowered--that wastes so much life.

Roth is equally adamant in rejecting any theodicy that compromises divine omnipotence. The need for theodicy only arises if one believes that God is all-powerful:

If God raised Jesus from the dead, he had the might to thwart the Holocaust before it ended.<sup>41</sup>

Rather than compromise the assertion of divine omnipotence, Roth qualifies the affirmation of God's goodness. He interprets Wiesel's motif of the Trial of God as an indictment of divine goodness: a God who permits such "waste" cannot be all-good. Thus, contention with God forms the basis of both Roth's critique of traditional theodicy, and his alternative "theodicy of protest". He responds to protest atheism by incorporating it within the framework of a religious response as "anti-theodicy".

There are two obvious criticisms that can be levelled against 'A Theodicy of Protest'. First, to what extent is it appropriate to describe Roth's strategy as theodicy, since he himself asserts that to "stay honest theodicy needs anti-theodicy"?<sup>42</sup> For, what is there left of theodicy in this approach? Roth persists with the framework of theodicy, even though he is adamant in dismissing any attempt to "explain", "justify" or "legitimate" the existence of evil. However, what is theodicy if not one of these three options? Second, can contention with God or protest atheism be incorporated within the framework of theodicy, even as "anti-theodicy"? Roth ignores the fact both motifs depend upon the rejection of theodicy: the moral outrage of the "angry believer" / "angry non-believer" is generated by the perceived inappropriateness of theodicy as a response to innocent suffering. To incorporate either back into a theodicy is to ignore the integrity of such outrage. The incorporation of contention with God / protest atheism shatters, rather than preserves, the credibility of theodicy in the light the Holocaust, the "paradigm evil event".

#### 10. 5. THE REJECTION OF THEODICY: STARTING ALL OVER AGAIN:

Contention with God and protest atheism both argue that the reality of suffering **as experienced by the victim** belongs in a "different dimension" to theodicy. If a Christian response to the Holocaust is to be consistent with the position articulated by Wiesel, then it must rest on the premise that theodicy is an inappropriate response

to the problem of evil. 'A Theodicy of Protest' fails to meet this criterion: it merely serves to highlight the incompatibility of contention with God / protest atheism and theodicy. Thus, a religious response to the Holocaust is both negative and positive. Negative in that it provides a critique of theodicy; positive, in that it suggests alternative criteria for our understanding of faith and religious language. Wiesel and Greenberg suggest that these alternative criteria lie primarily in a recognition of the irreducible problem posed by the counter-testimony of innocent suffering, and in the acceptance that the victim's experience of suffering provides the yardstick for religious language. An analogous position is articulated by the British philosopher of religion, Stewart Sutherland.<sup>43</sup>

Although Sutherland never directly addresses the Holocaust, the parallels between his ideas and those of Wiesel reflect a common interest in protest atheism. Much of his work forms a dialogue with the thought of Dostoyevsky and Camus.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Sutherland's work rests upon a premise analogous to that of "moment faith": he asserts that a response to the problem of evil belongs in the "borderlands" between belief and unbelief; in maintaining the tension between the two. Like Wiesel, he emphasises the closeness of the "angry believer" and the "angry non-believer" (protest atheist):

the boundaries between belief and unbelief are in certain important respects quite unclear. Believers who live close to the boundaries often share more with neighbourly unbelievers than they do with fellow believers who view the pastures of unbelief as far distant and dangerous lands from which they will for ever remain separated.<sup>45</sup>

Sutherland's understanding of living "close to the boundaries" is analogous to Greenberg's concept of "moment faith" (living life between the poles of Sinai and Auschwitz). Both concepts reflect the conviction that the anguish of protest / contention transcends the boundaries of belief and unbelief: it reflects a common sense of moral outrage rooted in solidarity with the victim.<sup>46</sup>

Sutherland's rejection of theodicy is based upon two criteria analogous to those suggested by Wiesel and Greenberg. The first of these criteria is the second of five that serve to provide the framework for **God, Jesus & Belief:**

**A religious belief which runs counter to our moral beliefs is to that extent unacceptable.**<sup>47</sup>

Theodicy is rejected on the grounds that it demands the acceptance of assertions that run "counter to our moral beliefs". The "rebellion" of Ivan Karamazov serves to illustrate the use of moral criteria as a critique of philosophical and theological assertions: any justification of suffering in terms of providence, the free will defence, or eschatological verification is rejected on the grounds that the moral "price" is too high. Ivan's protest becomes the model for Sutherland's suggested revision of theology and religious language:

we should refuse to allow moral convictions to be overruled by appeals to 'higher ways' which are, we are sometimes told, 'God's ways'; by incantations of 'mysteries' to which only someone else is privy; or by appeal to special revelation.<sup>48</sup>

However, cannot such a human formulation of moral criteria be interpreted as an expression of Promethean arrogance, promoting individual concerns at the expense of a universal perspective? Sutherland acknowledges that such moral criteria are necessarily limited in scope, but disputes that this undermines their validity as the basis of a response to the problem of evil:

Of course our moral convictions are **our** moral convictions and we are poor fallible sinners. But until they are changed by **moral** argument then they are the best moral convictions that we have.<sup>49</sup>

The content of theology and religious language is governed by a second criterion, that provides the starting point for Sutherland's analysis of theodicy in 'God and Evil: Starting All Over Again':

My intention is ... to begin with the plain fact of suffering, and to see what can be said theologically and religiously that is compatible with such a beginning.<sup>50</sup>

This second criterion provides a working principle analogous to those employed by Greenberg and Milosz: all three thinkers test language against "naked reality". The application of "the plain fact of suffering" as a criterion leads Sutherland to conclude that the problem of evil cannot be resolved by appeal to a "pre-formed" theology: theology must be articulated in the light of "naked reality". Thus, theology is that which can be said concerning God that is compatible with the "plain fact of suffering", and which does not run "counter to our moral beliefs". Theodicy is to be rejected because it responds to suffering in the light of a "pre-formed" theology and fails to address the "bench-mark of reality".<sup>51</sup>

However, in adopting "the plain fact of suffering" as the criterion for theology, is not silence the inevitable result: what can be said about God that remains credible in the light of such a criterion? Sutherland echoes Greenberg in acknowledging that a degree of silence is inevitable:

A theology which starts from the realities of suffering and evil in the world cannot avoid a high degree of agnosticism in its affirmations about God.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, religious language becomes consciously "faltering": it acknowledges its own provisional character. Sutherland suggests that an appropriate analogy is found in the notion of pilgrimage: theology becomes a spiritual and intellectual quest; a quest that "always includes the possibility of thinking again".<sup>53</sup> The impulse to think again is provided by confrontation with the "plain fact of suffering".

#### CONCLUSION:

Despite the common ground between "moment faith" and Sutherland's understanding of the "borderlands" of belief and belief, there would appear to be one major objection to the creation of a Christian response to the Holocaust, analogous to that of Wiesel, on the basis of the criteria laid out in *God, Jesus & Belief*. Sutherland's appeal for "a high degree of agnosticism" appears to be closer to the

reductionist approach of Richard Rubenstein than that of Elie Wiesel: Wiesel's response to the Holocaust is rooted in acceptance of a clearly defined religious tradition: the covenant. However, Sutherland's approach is minimalist rather than reductionist. Unlike Rubenstein, he does reject the truth-content of particular beliefs or theological concepts. Rather, he imposes limits on what can--and cannot--be said. It is not the content of theodicy that is rejected, as much as the notion that the theologian is in a position to suggest a rationale for the existence of evil. Hence, the choice of the term "agnosticism"--the belief that **nothing can be known** about the existence of God. Such "agnosticism" is closer to Wiesel's refusal to talk about God ("I never speak about God now. I rather speak of men who believed in God or men who denied God."<sup>54</sup>), than to Rubenstein's assertion that "there is neither judgement nor judge".

Thus, although Wiesel and Sutherland attach differing degrees of weight to the "classical" tradition from which they emerge, their critique of that tradition in the light of historical counter-testimony (the Holocaust / the "plain fact of suffering") derives from similar criteria: dissatisfaction with theodicy as an appropriate response to the problem of evil, and the assertion of the primacy of moral beliefs over theological affirmations. The difference is that Wiesel's moral beliefs are derived from covenantal ethics. As a consequence, his "agnosticism" is firmly rooted within the tradition. His position appears less minimalist than that of Sutherland because he is part of a tradition that interprets the covenant as a dialectic between promise and counter-testimony. Thus, there is a precedent within Judaism for the reinterpretation of the covenant in the light of disaster. Those calling for a reformulation of Judaism in response to the Holocaust can appeal to the precedent of the rabbinic response to the disasters of 70 and 135, and to Luria's reformulation of Kabbalah in the aftermath of the Expulsion from Spain. There is no analogous precedent in Christian theology. Hence, whereas the responses of Fackenheim, Greenberg and



Wiesel are held to fall within the spectrum of orthodoxy, that of Sutherland is considered to be outside this realm.

However, despite this apparent unorthodoxy, Sutherland's thought provides a potentially more constructive basis for a Christian response to the Holocaust, compared to that of Rosemary Radford Ruether or Jurgen Moltmann. In one sense, his criteria for approaching the problem of evil provide the framework that is lacking in Johann Baptist Metz' call for Christian theology to listen to the voices of victims. It is ironic that, even though he never directly confronts the Holocaust, Sutherland's work reveals greater sensitivity toward the questions that dominant discussion of the Holocaust: he recognises the implicit limitations in the capacity of theology, and more specifically religious language, to respond to the challenge posed by the "plain fact of suffering". The adoption of a framework, such as that suggested by Sutherland, would provide the basis for a Christian response to the Holocaust in which the voices of the victims could be heard, rather than be supplanted or submerged by the "answers" suggested by theologians.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Irving Greenberg, 'Religious Values After the Holocaust', 71.
2. The exception being Jürgen Moltmann, who implicitly rejects the uniqueness of the Holocaust; and, to a lesser extent, Eliezer Berkovits, who explicitly rejects the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but implicitly affirms it.
3. See: Elie Wiesel, 'A Personal Response', 36; and 'Art and Culture After the Holocaust', 403.
4. Immanuel Jakobovits, 'Some Personal, Theological and Religious Responses to the Holocaust', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 1989, 3: 4, 371-382.
5. John K. Roth, 'A Theodicy of Protest', 7-22, 30-37.
6. The Holocaust writer's concern over the conflicting claims of speech and silence reflects the Romantics' preoccupation with locating an appropriate vehicle for the representation of nature. The Holocaust writer stands within an existing tradition, but, whereas the Romantic poet's aim was the apposite representation of beauty; the Holocaust writer strives after the "perfect" representation of horror--to this extent, Holocaust literature can be regarded as an inversion of the Romantic quest.
7. The disproportionately high number of suicides among Holocaust writers has been frequently noted. Among those writers who have committed suicide are: Jean Améry; Tadeusz Borowski; Paul Celan; Primo Levi; Piotr Rawicz; Bruno Werzberger; and Joseph Wulf. Other writers have chosen to cease writing about the Holocaust after one novel: André Schwartz Bart; Jerzy Kosinski. In addition, James Young notes the number of suicides among non-survivors who have addressed the Holocaust: John Berryman; Randall Jarrell; Anne Sexton; and Sylvia Plath. See Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, 125-9.
8. See Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980, 82-95.
9. The term "faltering speech" is chosen as both an allusion and a contrast to Susan Shapiro's term, "failing speech". Rosenfeld's term "expiration" is preferred to "failing speech", because of the more obvious allusion to the fact that the physical silence (in death or madness) of the writer often follows the "drying up" of the poetic voice. The term "faltering speech" describes a more positive response to the conflicting claims of speech and silence; one that allows for the continued creativity of the writer. See Susan E. Shapiro, 'Failing Speech: Post-Holocaust Writing and the Discourse of Postmodernism', *Semeia*, 1987, 40, 65-91, 67-74.

10. For a definition of socialist realism, see Czeslaw Milosz, **The Captive Mind**, trans. Jane Zielonko, London: Secker & Warburg, 1953, x-v, 40-53, 128-34.
11. Jan Kott, 'Introduction' to Tadeusz Borowski, **This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen**, 11-26, 25. For an analysis of Borowski's suicide in the context of his literary strategy, see: Kott, 20-1; Ezrahi, **By Words Alone**, 53-66; Milosz, **The Captive Mind**, 122-34; Young, **Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust**, 104-6.
12. Milosz, **The Captive Mind**, 41.
13. Kott, 'Introduction', 19-21.
14. Ibid.12.
15. Borowski, **This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen**, 131-2, 161-80; Young, **Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust**, 106.
16. Ezrahi, **By Words Alone**, 55; Young, **Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust**, 104.
17. Ibid.
18. Borowski, **This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen**, 29.
19. Milosz notes that Borowski's literary persona does not correspond with contemporaries' reports of his behaviour in Auschwitz. See **The Captive Mind**, 123.
20. Borowski, cited in Kott, 'Introduction', 22.
21. Borowski, **This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen**, 168.
22. The unwillingness of the survivor to acknowledge the "portion of the sad fame of Auschwitz" that clings to him provides the theme of the short story, 'A Visit': "I sit in someone else's room, among books that are not mine, and, as I write about the sky, and the men and women I have seen, I am troubled by one persistent thought--that I have never been able to look also at myself.", Borowski, **This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen**, 174-6, 175-6.
23. Ibid. 178-9.
24. Ezrahi, **By Words Alone**, 21-3, 67-95.
25. Holocaust literature has generated a series, of now archetypal, images; clouds / ashes, gravestones / cemeteries, and cattlecars / trains are the more obvious examples. See: Wiesel, **The Accident**, 33, 116-20; **The Gates of the Forest**, 7; **Twilight**, 170-4; Young, **Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust**, 172-89.
26. Wiesel, **The Gates of the Forest**, 119-22; **Twilight**, 105-13.
27. Wiesel, 'The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration', 9; 'Art and Culture After the Holocaust', 411.
28. **Muselmann** translates literally as "Muslim". The etymology of the term is unclear. Primo Levi notes two possible explanations (neither of which are deemed

convincing): the term either refers to a supposed fatalism on the part of the victim, or to the rags worn around the head--supposedly resembling a turban. See Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 77.

29. Primo Levi, *If This is a Man*, 96.
30. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying*, 1-34; Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 68-82.
31. Irving Greenberg, 'The Third Great Cycle in Jewish History', 16.
32. Irving Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire', 23.
33. *Ibid.* 42.
34. See: Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 96-100; Stewart Sutherland, *God, Jesus & Belief: The Legacy of Theism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, 22-4.
35. Ed. Davis, *Encountering Evil*, 6. The other essayists are: John Hick; Stephen Davis; David Griffin; and Frederick Sontag.
36. John Roth, *A Consuming Fire*.
37. Roth, 'A Theodicy of Protest', 7.
38. *Ibid.* 8.
39. *Ibid.* 8-9, 11-5, 19.
40. *Ibid.* 12, 10, 8.
41. *Ibid.* 14.
42. *Ibid.* 34.
43. Sutherland's work, particularly his critique of theodicy, should be considered within the wider context of recent discussion of the problem of evil, see: ed. Davis, *Encountering Evil*; J. L. Mackie, *The Legacy of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, 150-76; Herbert McCabe, *God Matters*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987, 2-51; Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*; Richard Swinburne, D. Z. Phillips, and John Hick, 'The Problem of Evil', in ed. Stuart C. Brown, *Reason and Religion*, London: Cornell University Press, 1977, 81-139.
44. Stewart Sutherland, *Atheism and the Rejection of God: Contemporary Philosophy and 'The Brothers Karamazov'*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977; *Faith and Ambiguity*, London: SCM, 1984, 1-27, 76-105; *God, Jesus & Belief*, 151-62.
45. Sutherland, *Faith and Ambiguity*, xi-ii.
46. *Ibid.* xii; *Atheism and the Rejection of God*, 141-2.
47. Sutherland, *God, Jesus & Belief*, 16. For a list of all five criteria, see 15-8.
48. Stewart Sutherland, 'A Reply to Richard Harries', *Theology*, 1988, 91, 317-20, 319.

49. Ibid. 320.
50. Sutherland, **God, Jesus & Belief**, 21.
51. Sutherland, 'A Reply to Richard Harries', 318.
52. Sutherland, **God, Jesus & Belief**, 129.
53. Sutherland, **Faith and Ambiguity**, 107.
54. Wiesel, 'Talking, and Writing, and Keeping Silent',  
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